

The
STRAIGHT
ROAD



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BROWN

"BE STILL
THERE'S NEED OF ME
OR I WOULD NOT BE"

WALTER K. & CARRIE PARKINSON



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THE STRAIGHT ROAD



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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
C. E. CHAMBERS



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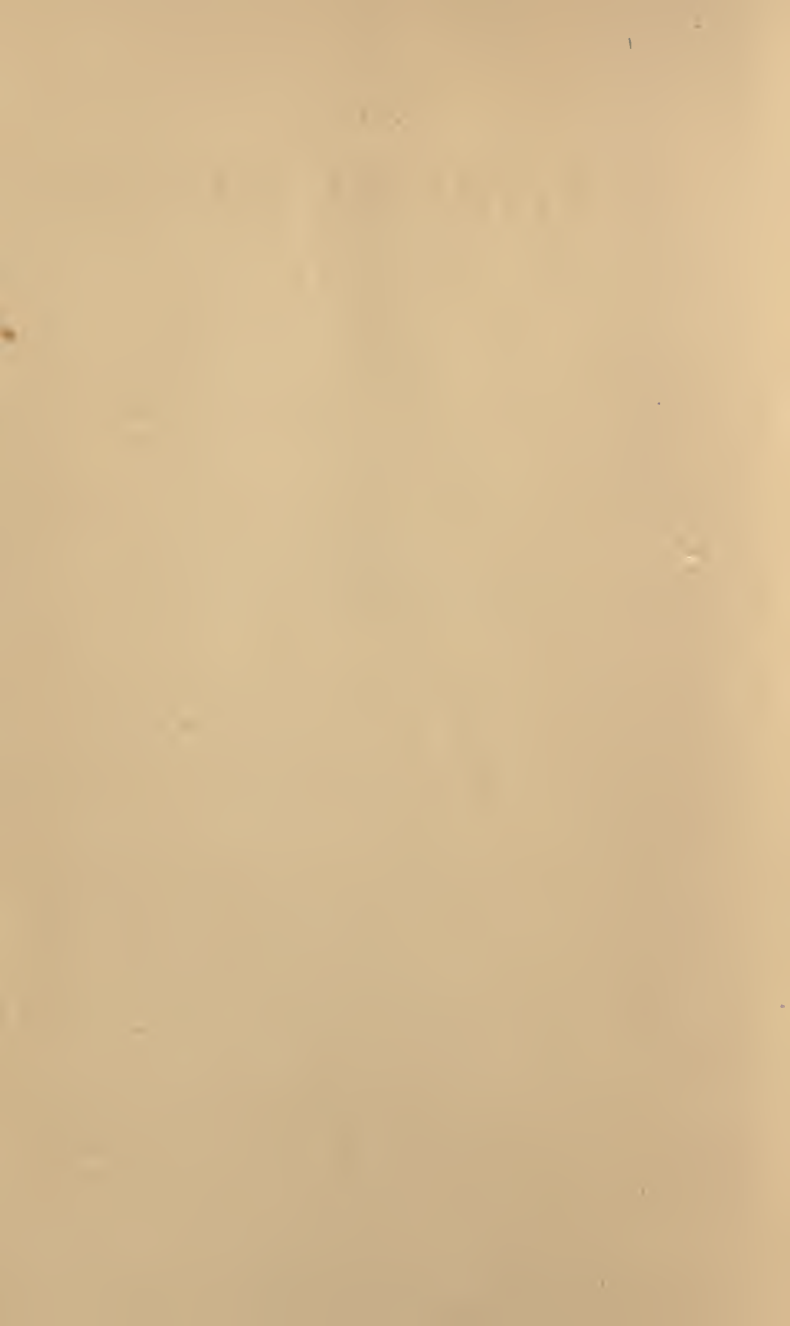
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CHAPTER I

THE DOOR I SHUT BEHIND ME

IT BLEW to with a slam behind me. Only a few weeks beyond my twenty-second birthday I was leaving my husband's house, my only home since I came into it five years before, a bride of seventeen. For a moment the shutting of that door reverberated through all my universe; then the child pulled at my hand and questioned in a small, excited voice,

"Where we going, muvver? Is faver coming, too?"

The answer I gave my four-year-old, there in the dark of my little front yard, pungent with the keen odour of the big eucalyptus trees by the fence, covered the case so far as I, Callie Baird, then saw it.

"I don't know for sure, dearie. Way off on the railroad. Father's not coming with us. You're mother's big man now."

I spoke in a whisper, listening all the time for a sound from inside the house. Had the slamming of the door waked my husband? In the dark about me I could scarcely see the bits of plants and vines I had put out; the smell from my petunias—from the honeysuckle at my kitchen window—made my heart all at once sick and faint.

But the door was shut; the die was cast. The note in there on the kitchen table told Oliver that I intended to leave him and get a divorce. I felt a kind of pitiful pride in this letter; even yet it seems to me a bit out of the common for a woman of my age and in my situation to write.

It admitted with humility my sense of personal failure; it explained that I was going away because I felt our living together to be immoral, and that I would take care of myself and the child if I were allowed a divorce in peace. My trunk was left ready packed with my few precious books, my own and Boy's clothes; I would send for it when I knew how to answer that question of his.

The letter was the last of a number of such, which I had thought over, agonised over, written, and then burned. The definite intention to go took shape in my mind four months earlier when I was crawling up from the desperate illness that followed the birth of my little girl. The child lived only long enough to show me what my marriage meant from the point of view of motherhood. Boy had brought me no such accusation. Boy was all mine. I named him John Boyce, and I saw in him always my own father; not the father an ignorant, childish mother had given him. My father had always understood me, because we were alike mentally; he would have equipped me for life. If he had lived I should not have been afoot in the night, unable to tell the child where we were going, shabby, heartsick, with scarcely a cent in my pocket, and only the prospect of eleven dollars and sixty-five cents cream money that I meant to collect at Flegel's grocery and butcher shop on my way to the station.

I was ten years old when father died. The cattle ranch where I was born and raised, there in the Oregon hills above Stanleyton, near the California state line, was a big property, and my mother was no manager. By the time I was fifteen we had nothing and were living down in the village, her whole anxiety to see me old enough to marry. She had been an uncommonly pretty girl; she had married early, to become the petted wife of a strong man. Her outlook on life was the sheltered woman's. All its harsher, fundamental facts were indecent in her eyes; she kept from me what she could—and indeed that was

nearly everything. Peace be to the poor little pretty mother who thought she had done her part so well by me when she manœuvred me into the marriage I was now running away from, and saw that I went into it as ignorant of what it meant, almost, as I would have been at seven instead of seventeen.

I never could be quite sure as to whether or not she understood the failure of that marriage. She lived right there in the house with it till after Jacky-Boy was born, and given father's name. On the small dairy ranch above Meaghers, we two women worked hard together, but we didn't talk much over our work. She seemed to be failing. When the baby came she used to sit by the hour holding him, rocking a little, never saying a word. Six months after that we carried her back to the ranch to lay her beside father in the little family burying ground that had been reserved there. And I attacked alone the problem of life with a man I had not wittingly chosen at all.

Do not think I blame my mother. She could never have married me to Oliver Baird if it had not been for the shipwreck of a boy-and-girl love affair between me and Philip Stanley.

A boy-and-girl love affair—authority holds it cheap, and speaks easily of "breaking it up"; yet I believe that there are men and women who go all their days, face over shoulder, looking back to that place in the way where real love, who had been of their company, left them.

It seemed to me when my time came that no item of pain and humiliation was spared, no mercy was shown me. They tore down my gossamer-spun dwelling of dreams as an energetic woman, sweeping her house, drags down a cobweb with the broom. Every least little detail stands out in my memory—ice and fire. For years I was burnt or frozen whenever my mind touched a corner of it.

Philip was the only son of the richest people in the village. Back in father's time when I, a small girl, used to

ride my pony down to school, Philip was the terror of the primary grades, his offences passed over because everybody was afraid of his father. Fine-looking, fastidious gentleman that he was, L. C. Stanley's outrageous temper had brought him into more than one fist fight on the public street. People who were getting along with Mr. Stanley admired him very much; and I'm sure Philip, if he liked you, could be very kind; when he loved you, he was sweetness itself. But the place was full of gossip about the Stanley home life, the continual clashes of father and son, whippings that went on there, till the boy was a young athlete big enough to turn on his tyrant, so that the mother was frightened, and stood between them. I knew the worst about all these things; for from the first I had been Philip's chosen, from whom he kept back nothing. And on my part, I can't remember when I wasn't so in love with him that it was like a religion, a conversion, an apothecosis. The mere sight of him in the other classroom of a morning—making everybody else look cheap and poor—would leave me happy for all day. He was four years older than I, but he had been so unruly, and so irregular in his attendance that high school found us still in the same Latin class. Nobody else knew it, but I was the reason for Philip's being in that class. He was with a tutor that year, getting ready for Stanford; but he held to this one period in the Stanleyton public school, because it gave him a chance to see me every day, and carry my books home. He didn't want anybody else to come near me. It wasn't any trouble for him, a high school boy, to send Harvey Watkins, a young man already out in the village world attacking affairs of his own, to the right-about when he tried to be a bit sentimental over me.

And what a wonderful-looking boy he was—a young prince among the others! He wore his faults like ornaments; it just became him to be so haughty and harsh and

secretive. Nothing was too good for him; he was recklessly extravagant, and I suppose his parents thought that the only way to hold on to their formidable son was to shut down on the money. He never had an allowance, so that what he spent—much or little—could always be a cause of quarrel. Philip had awful times with his father over tailor and livery bills, and the expenses of his vacation trips. When the other boys were getting class pins at two dollars apiece, he had his mounted in platinum and with a real diamond, so that it cost seventy-five. The year that he was twenty and I was sixteen, he made bills so recklessly that his father threatened to advertise in the paper that he wouldn't be responsible for them. That didn't stop Philip. He justified himself—said that his father was rich and he the only heir—that the money he spent was really his. In a sense that was true. But then he did something, I never knew just what, that made him liable to the law, and they had the worst scene of all over that. He didn't tell me a word of this till afterward—not because he was ashamed of it; Philip was never ashamed of anything he did—but because this time the quarrel concerned me.

I realise now that mother hoped everything from that childish attachment. She had begun asking me about Philip—if he had kissed me, if he said he loved me, and if marriage had ever been mentioned between us. I was overwhelmed with shame. It seemed like conspiring against him to think of such things.

And yet, so curiously is the human heart made, I believe my mother's words precipitated matters, for the affair between Philip and me came suddenly to flower. I couldn't get away from the thoughts she had put in my head, and it was as though he read them in my eyes and took fire from their suggestion. I don't remember when or where it began, but all at once he was talking to me about being married to him, and we had kissed each other

—and knew that there could never be anybody else for either of us as long as we both lived!

First love, boy-and-girl love, is such a fiery, innocent thing, unconscious of its real power, yet proposing to rebuild the whole world for its dwelling. In those days—oh, how few, how few they were!—it was not merely a look at Philip that set me trembling with happiness for hours; if we could get a moment out of sight it was a kiss—a boy's kiss, snatched, clumsy, but with the flame, the swimming ecstasy of youth in it. Oh, the memory of such a love ought to keep a woman from those spiritual compromises which are the beginning of moral death.

I didn't tell my mother, but of course she guessed. She dressed me so carefully, and told me again and again how pretty I was growing. She knew what lit my eye and painted a new bloom on my cheeks.

Then came a day when the first moment I looked at Philip across the school room, I was conscious of a change, of deep disturbance, in him. He whispered to me as we were filing from study hall to recitation room for our Latin that he must see me that evening. Silently, infected by the hidden excitement of his mood, I walked beside him out to Kesterson's pasture after school, where we sat under a big live-oak by the creek. He seemed strange, and that made me feel strange, too. But he had never been so openly my lover. He wanted to have me in his arms, to kiss me every minute. I would have been crazy with joy if I hadn't been so frightened all the time at the chance of our being seen.

"What is it, Philip?" I whispered, at last.

"Callie," he said, taking hold of me again, "we've had it out at last, up at our house. Father threatened to send me to jail this time. I told him to go ahead and do it—and then he wanted to lick me."

The muscles of the best football player on the team

laughed under my cheek as Philip said that. He shook me a little in his arms.

"Mother put in her oar. We've compromised. I'm going to San Francisco Wednesday, to be gone for a month."

"To San Francisco—for a month!" I clung to him. "Oh, Philip—why?"

"To get a job. If I had a job you and I could be married," he said, unsteadily, and his heart plunged so that I could feel it where my head rested against him.

Philip hunting a job—so we could be married! One idea was as bewildering as the other. I looked at him. He had always poured out his heart to me; but now he was keeping something back, and I dared not question him. With his arms around me, his lips thrilling against mine, I was afraid to be told.

Our parting had been so tumultuous that it was only after he was gone I realised he had said nothing of our writing to each other. This seemed strange, for we used to exchange notes very often, living here in the same town. But I thought of course he would write and send me an address; then I'd get a letter every day and have the chance to write to him daily. I waited in a tremor of expectation for that first letter. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday—by the middle of the week I was uneasy. Thursday, Friday, Saturday—I was wild with anxiety. My nerves were jerking at every little start. I would jump and scream at every sound. I could not keep from stealing past the Stanley house, though it was a square out of my way to and from school. That month was an age-long, agonising strain. No letter came. I had nobody I dared tell. My mother suspected, I suppose, and I was grateful to her for not speaking out. Then, on the last Friday morning, when I was slipping past the hedge by the Stanley place on my way to school, furtively watching the windows, Philip's mother stopped me and asked me to come and see her the next afternoon. She seemed to have been

working at her roses, with gloves drawn over her white hands and a broad hat on; she offered me some flowers as we talked. She was a fine-looking woman, always perfectly dressed, and her likeness to Philip made me ready to lay my face in the dust before her and worship her.

The revulsion from despair to hope was almost more than I could bear. I felt myself blushing hotly. I could hardly speak. I had never exchanged more than a dozen words with her before; there was no social relation between our little house and the Stanley place. My whole being was tremulous with the thought that she had been watching for me—her invitation must mean that everything was all right. Oh, supposing Philip was expected home the next day, and she wanted me to meet him! I got through the Friday classes somehow. I was almost glad that Philip had not written me during the month. The outcome would be all the more splendid and rapturous for the misery I had passed through. When I got home to my mother, she, though she knew so much less than I did of how far things had gone, jumped at once to the conclusion that Mrs. Stanley wanted to get better acquainted with me because of Philip, and that she wasn't unfavourable.

Mother washed my white shirt-waist after ten o'clock that night, and the last I knew as I went to sleep was the sight of her sitting by the lamp darning a rip in my skirt. Next day she fussed a long time over getting me ready. I ought to look just perfect, but still I mustn't seem too much dressed up. Mother kissed me when I left, and called me by Philip's name in a whisper. It made my face flame—and that made her laugh a little shaky laugh that was almost like crying.

Mrs. Stanley met me with friendly courtesy, yet, inexperienced village girl as I was, I missed something in that reception. Its chill fell on me as we crossed the porch

—she had been waiting for me on the front steps. I knew before I was seated in the handsome parlour that things were not going to be as my mother and I had hoped.

I can never go over that interview with Mrs. Staniey in my mind completely; I get confused before I come to the end of it, and it is just one recollection of pain and humiliation—ice and fire, as I said. She began with real feeling: Philip was their only son; she and Mr. Stanley were very ambitious for him. I tried to answer with reasonable calmness that everybody knew Philip was going to be a great man, and there wasn't anything too good for him. In my confusion I must have spoken as though that brilliant future of his would be concerned with mine, for the first thing I knew she was telling me that nothing could be more ruinous to Philip than trying to tie him up now with a childish love affair. She looked at me sitting there twisting my handkerchief between my hands; I thought she pitied me, for she said, hastily:

“I'm considering you, too, as well as my boy. I'm glad you realise that Philip has the makings of a big man. I've lived longer than you, my dear girl; I've seen many a man go ahead in the world, outgrow the woman he married too young—too young—long for his freedom, or maybe take it; and then there's nothing but misery in it for both.”

“—Engagement——” I choked.

“Oh,” cried Mrs. Stanley, impatiently, “how little you realise! That would not be fair to you. I am not willing to see my son absorbing all your attention during these years in which you might be making a suitable match, only to fail you in the end.”

She seemed sure that he would fail me in the end.

“What do you want me to do?” asked a voice that I hardly recognised as my own.

“Well, Mr. Stanley thinks that you ought, if you are a right-minded girl, to return any signed letters you may have of Philip's. The boy's not of age—of course his sig-

nature doesn't count—but we feel that you ought to do that. The gifts you might keep.”

“All—I'll send them all,” I said, in despair.

I was going; I was giving up; but through the window I caught sight of Philip himself, walking in the side yard under the trees, sending glances toward the house, as though he were waiting for me. Instead of the rapture I had looked forward to after that awful month, I felt only a strange sinking of the heart—longing, fear, pain. Yet I turned and came back.

“Mrs. Stanley,” I said, “did you know that Philip went to San Francisco to get work so that we could be married?”

She laughed out angrily.

“I should think that I did know: we sent him. If he can support a wife, he may choose one for himself. If we've got her to support, Mr. Stanley and I think we ought to have something to say about who she shall be.”

“And he—and he——” I faltered.

“Perhaps you'd better go and talk to him,” she interrupted.

I whirled and ran. I blundered down the steps, across the trim, gravelled walks and brilliant, crowded flower beds, my starved heart crying out for Philip. He did not take one step toward me; he had drawn back, and stood so that we came together in a little alley of the grounds. Tall trees walled in a seclusion overlooked only by the angels of God from the sky; yet my impetuous boy lover of a month ago made no motion to touch me. His head was up, but the face he showed was white. The month had left him worn and hollow-eyed. I knew in the first moment that he hadn't wanted to see me; he had put me outside the barrier. He didn't speak. I had to begin.

“Oh, Philip!” It burst from me, though I was desperately anxious not to offend. “Why didn't you write to me?”

"Promised not to." His first word—and in what a strange voice!

"Why didn't you let me write to you, then? I'd have been glad."

"Promised that, too." He was staring straight in my face. I had seen him look at other people that way, and wondered how they could stand it. "He wouldn't let me have the money to go unless I'd give my word. I had to have money. Even with it——" He stopped a moment; an agony of crimson came up in his haggard, arrogant young face—"I couldn't get any job."

"Oh, Philip—I didn't want you to—— Not for me—not for me!"

He didn't seem to hear me

"What did mother say to you in there?" he asked, very low.

"She made me promise to give you up—for always. But you won't—— If we—— After a while——"

Philip stood and looked long on the ground. When his gaze at last came up to mine, I wondered what I had done to him to make him look so terrible.

"What's the use?" he demanded, huskily. "We'll have to give it up. They've got us. She didn't tell you. Cal-lie, you know what I said about his sending me to jail? I tried to get enough that time for us to marry on—and he's got the proofs. Not that I'm ashamed or sorry—he's the one to be ashamed—it's all his fault. But he's got the proofs; and he'll send me to penitentiary—he's just mad enough—unless I—unless we——"

"Oh, we will—we will—anything——" It was all that I could say.

Again he stood looking on the ground, bitter and pitiful, that haughty lip of his set hard to steady the trembling. I ought to have gone then, but I couldn't drag myself away. I thought there would be something more—

some kind of good-bye. Suddenly he looked up at me and burst out:

"They said it would be just like it was with Uncle Milt. Huh, Milt's a boob! But, at that, he'd have done well enough if they hadn't thrown him down. They wouldn't have thrown him down if he hadn't married——"

"Don't—oh, please don't!" I whispered, covering my face.

When Philip's Uncle Milton, Lucius Stanley's younger brother, married a waitress at the Depot Hotel, it set everybody talking about the poor thing's reputation, that had never been very good. Of course, the family was furious. Milt Stanley hadn't amounted to much. Now, with his brother against him, he went down terribly. He worked at such odd jobs as he could get about town; sometimes he did house-cleaning. She was worse talked about than ever, though it could be seen that more than half the time she kept bread in their mouths. To this squalid village shame a possible marriage with me was compared.

I had no heart for resentment. I wasn't the least bit angry. Philip's only way of meeting this defeat and humiliation was to put me outside and keep me outside, because the sight—the thought, even—of me now was still more wounding and humiliating. But I could see that he was suffering, in there where he would not let me come. There was a dull wonder in my mind that he should not care for even a good-bye kiss—then a sort of terror that this was so! Was that all there would be to it? Was love like this?

I turned; I had to go away and leave him standing there, looking strange and sort of desperate. All I knew was that I didn't know anything about him any more.

I went out to Kesterson's pasture—it was the only handy place where I could be sure of being alone—and walked up and down and up and down in a dumb, blind agony for a long time, looking away from the big live-oak

where Philip had held me in his arms and said he was going to get a job and marry me, thinking how was I ever to go home to mother with the story. Finally I started, very slowly. When I came in sight of our little rented house, there was mother at the gate, gazing up and down the sidewalk for me, because in getting back from Mrs. Stanley's I might come from either direction, according to the cross-street I chose to take. I looked around me; I would rather have died then and there than to keep on and meet her questions. We got into the house somehow, and there I broke down and cried so that I scared her—I even believe I screamed some.

Perhaps it was best so. She had to stop questioning and soothe me; and I felt after a while that I must control myself for her sake. She got me to drink a cup of tea; she put my feet in hot water, and we two disappointed, discredited things finally crept to bed.

When, next day, it came to making the little packet to send to Philip, she stood by protesting:

"I wouldn't do it, Callie. I wouldn't do that, dear."

"I promised," I said, holding my head down. I couldn't tell her that Philip himself had failed me.

"Promised!" she echoed with all a primitive woman's contempt.

Poor little mother, she had no business sense; she lost the ranch; we owed bills in every direction. But she did not lack instinctive womanly wisdom; she would have fought for her hand; she would have tried—tried desperately and at all costs—to keep her lover.

I let him go. But when he was gone I couldn't have been said to be disappointed in love—I was disappointed in life—I was just killed, dead and buried. Nobody knew—my mother least of all—as nobody had known how dreadfully I was in love with him. There was a year between me and my graduation. At first mother had to get me up and dress me and help me off to school as though I

had been an invalid. But after a while I took hold of my school work for comfort, and when the year had gone by I was even not offended at mother's efforts to make a match between me and a man who had rented one of our rooms. He was a good deal older than I, and was looking about for a little dairy ranch.

If Philip and I were not to marry, it didn't matter what became of me. With him vanished out of my life, for the time, not only love, but every gleam of girlish ambition. Mother couldn't bear the thought of my standing in a store, or even teaching school. She craved for me the woman's ancient heritage of husband, home and children. And when Oliver Baird finally did ask me, and I accepted him, she was so pleased; she was so proud that the white dress I had for high school graduation should also be my wedding gown.

I was seventeen; I took the man I could get—or that she got for me—took him, I may say, thankfully, and in whole-hearted ignorance of what I was really doing. I told him honestly that I could not love him, that I believed love and I had parted ways forever. He was willing to have me on those terms! He had finally bought his dairy ranch at Meaghers, just across the State line in Siskiyou County; we were married and went to live there, mother going with us. Crossing into California seemed to me somehow like getting nearer to father; he had come from there, he always loved the State, and named me for it.

The reason that I could tolerate Oliver Baird in the intimacies of courtship and marriage seemed to be that he was at all points the opposite of Philip. He was as apart from that boy lover of mine as though they had not both been human males. A man who had reminded me of Philip I could not have married; but this one never breathed that air of young love's region; he never walked there. Without ideals, or illusions; inert, negative; he

wanted only the lees of mating, and he resented the intrusion of a child that roiled those dregs and brought me enough womanhood to feel that whatever such a marriage might be to Oliver, to me it was an unhallowed, a wicked thing.

It was John Boyce's birth that showed it to me first: and after the little girl, who only lived long enough to let me see that she had her father's loose mouth and ungainly hand, I knew that my crime was not against myself alone. I had never heard of eugenics. In my marriage I had hugged the dream of children. Mine was always a hungry heart. It was not alone being loved that could comfort me; I yearned always for something that I could love; but the tragic outcome of this meddling with the source of humanity, this bringing children into the world who should never have been born, all to medicine a heartsick girl's pain, came to look to me almost as terribly wicked as it is. I suffered. In those days if anybody had asked me what was the matter, I should have answered like an ailing child, "Everything." I ached in every member of my life. There was nothing, it seemed, that did not hurt me.

When we are young we wonder what our humiliations and our agonies are for. Mine had driven me thus far. Their whip was on my back that April night as I bent to pull the gate shut after me, setting down the suit-case to do it, hooking the chain over to make it fast, though it came to me painfully that to-morrow there would be nobody to care if the pigs and cows got in and destroyed all the flowers I had worked so hard over. As I got Boy through the gate there was a metallic clank. I reached down to see what he had.

"Bud'n go 'long—bud'n wants to go," he exclaimed, defensively.

Bud'n—the word was Boy's way of saying bug—was a brass paper-weight belonging to the child's father. Why

Boy should have been so infatuated with it let the psychologist of childhood explain—I never could tell. The thing was clumsy, heavy, ugly—a realistic representation of a gigantic fly, whose wings lifted up, allowing the hollow body beneath to be used for a pen box. Perhaps Boy's determination to possess and play with this thing was made so strong because his father ordered him to let it alone. Certainly Oliver and his son remained strangers to the last. This trumpery toy had been the cause of more than one battle royal between them. I had meant to leave it safe on the table; but I could not for the life of me turn back and carry it in now. I would drop it on the garden walk.

"No!" Boy resisted when I attempted to take it away from him. His raised, shrill little voice set my heart thumping with apprehension. "No! I will carry my bud'n. Bud'n wants to go, too."

"Sssh!" I cautioned, and we set out, Boy with his bud'n, I with my suit-case. There had been a little new moon at sunset, but it was gone now. The hills made a dark rim all around the horizon; on their slopes I could see here and there winking lights—homes of small ranchers like ourselves. Looking at them, my thought coloured by my own experience, I wondered if any one of those roofs covered a sort of domestic inferno. It must be so. I couldn't be the only one who had made a mess of life. But I knew I was the only one who was escaping to-night.

Halfway down the hill Boy gave out. First he handed me his bud'n, then took it back jealously, hugged it to him, and insisted that I must carry them both. I argued a bit, but the outcome was that I shouldered my baby, picked up my suit-case and went on toward the valley, Flegel's and the station.

I must hurry or the grocery would be closed, and the Flegels gone upstairs for the night. I had to have that money to take me and the boy to San Vincente in one of

the valleys of the California fruit belt. I had had a girl's reason for selecting San Vicente. Nearly seven years before, Delia Rogers, from there, had visited our next-door neighbours. She was a rather full-blown young lady, owning to twenty-five, and bluntly announced by her aunt as older, and I a little past fifteen. They were a childless couple, and despite the disparity in our years, I was called on to help Mrs. Rogers out when she wanted to entertain young people for Delia. In those days I was poor only in money. Delia soon spent most of her time at our house, sleeping in my little bedroom more often than at her uncle's. It was the year before Philip went east. "Down at Callie Boyce's house" was the synonym for a lively frolic among the Stanleyton young people, where all ages gathered indiscriminately to make up a circle. Harvey Watkins was so much older than the rest of the boys that, till the San Vicente visitor came, there was no one anywhere near his age to pair him off with. Harvey was a little set apart in our crowd, too, from the fact that he was a widower. He had made a very young marriage, and his bride had lived only five or six months. He showed Delia Rogers a good deal of attention. He afterward went to San Vicente himself, entered a law firm there, and married her. I hadn't heard from either of them since the marriage, yet I hoped they would both befriend me now.

It was hard work carrying that baby and suit-case down the hill; I tried several times to get Boy to walk, but he was very sleepy, though I'd given him an extra long nap that afternoon. It got worse and worse; my arms felt as though they would drop off. Again and again I had to stop and rest; and when I finally got down to Flegel's I was soaked with perspiration and shaking all over, glad enough that my old grey sweater was a sleazy thing.

I could have cried when I found the store closed. Everybody knew what Mrs. Flegel was; an ill-natured woman with a bad tongue, and crazy jealous of her hus-

band. Women being jealous of their husbands was a thing that had never troubled me up to this moment. But when I stood in front of the store and wanted to get that money, I found that I dreaded to meet Mrs. Flegel. I knocked half reluctantly on the store door, in hopes that Flegel himself would answer. Nobody came. I knocked again, louder. Boy roused and looked around wonderingly.

"Where are we, Muvver?" he asked, drowsily.

"At Flegel's grocery store, dearie."

"You goin' to get Boy candy?" He showed sudden interest.

"Not just now." I walked around to the back stairs and stood there looking up at the light, listening.

"Dear," I said, "will you be a brave boy and stay here with the suit-case while mother goes upstairs? She can look right down on you all the time."

"Will I get the candy if I stay?"

"After we get on the train, Boyce, if you'll be a big, brave boy."

"Uh-huh—Boycie stay."

I left the little figure on the suit-case, and, shrinking from the sound of my footsteps, from my shadow on the stair, I dragged myself up to that back door. The burden of dread and shame that was on me made the weight of the child and the suit-case that I had been carrying seem light.

It was ten-year-old Gusta Flegel who answered to my knock.

"Could I see your father a minute?" I spoke very low.

The child didn't answer me at all. She just turned her head over her shoulder and bawled:

"Maw—here's a woman!"

This was worse than I had expected. Gusta knew me well enough. Mrs. Flegel came across the kitchen, wiping her wet hands on her apron.

"I wanted to see Mr. Flegel," I said.

"What for?"

I couldn't get out a word. Choking, ready to cry, I stood pulling down the cuffs of my sweater.

"Well?"

Mrs. Flegel's broad form blocked the door. She and Gusta were both staring at me—at my dress, my hat, my shoes. I was thankful that Boyce and the suit-case were downstairs out of their sight. Finally, when I didn't say anything, the woman spoke again:

"Is it anything I can tend to?"

"No," I blurted. "Mr. Flegel—the cream money—I need—I've got to——"

"You want to collect?" She came a step nearer and dropped her voice.

"Yes. I've got to have it to-night."

"What's that you've got to have to-night?" It was little old Flegel who spoke, coming from the sitting-room, in his stocking-feet, pipe in hand. He looked at me over his wife's shoulder. "Oh, it's Mrs. Baird," he said. "Won't you come in? Why don't you ask her in, Rosa?"

"Thank you, I can't stop," I said. "I only wanted to get the cream money. Can you let me have it to-night?"

For a minute nobody spoke. Flegel looked a little queer; Mrs. Flegel shut her mouth tight; she purpled, and seemed to puff up as she stared first at me, then at her husband.

"Sure!" he said. "It's eleven dollars and sixty-five cents, ain't it?"

Mrs. Flegel stuck her face up close to his.

"You going to give it to her?" she demanded.

"Sure I am. Why not?"

"You paid Baird yesterday. I seen you."

The first knowledge I had of what I was doing after that was Flegel pushing his angry wife away and saying kindly to me: "Now, I wouldn't cry. Don't you cry."

I'll let you have what you need against next month's cream."

"Next month's cream!" Would Oliver let next month's cream go for a debt of mine? If Mrs. Flegel hadn't been there muttering insults about his never seeing the colour of his money again, I should have told the kind little man exactly how matters stood, and asked him plainly to lend me the money. As it was, I couldn't think of anything but my own necessities.

"I've got to have as much as ten dollars," I burst out, scarcely knowing what I said.

"Well, I can let you have ten dollars," said Flegel. "Rosa, be still."

Funny, square little old Flegel—when I was a child at home on the ranch, and we were comparatively rich, and he was just starting his grocery and butcher shop, father used to sell him beef on credit. I remember his coming all the way to Stanleyton for a calf or a sheep that he could get and pay for in his own time. I was inheriting the goodwill of those days now.

I hoped he would go downstairs to the cash register to get my ten dollars, and still give me a chance to explain out of Mrs. Flegel's hearing that I was leaving Meaghers for good and would send the money back as soon as I got work in San Vicente. But he put his hand in his pocket and gave me a gold piece from his worn purse.

I took it without a word. As the door shut and I started downstairs, I could hear the quarrel still going on. Tomorrow, when what I had done was known, Mrs. Flegel would make the story twice as bad. She would say that I had obtained money from her husband under false pretences. I knew a person could be arrested for that. At the foot of the stairs I had half a mind to turn back, but loud voices still sounded above. After all, I had to have the money, and they would know in due time why.

Boyce was sound asleep in a soft little lump, partly on

and partly off the suit-case. I picked him up and brushed off his suit carefully—it was the only nice thing he had; I had made it myself from the cloth dress that was in my wedding outfit.

I found the station all lit up and empty. The clock showed nearly an hour till train time. Boyce slept soundly. I made him comfortable with my cloak over him on the bench in the women's room, got out the paper and stamped envelope I had provided myself with for this purpose, and, with the suit-case for a desk, wrote to Ben Frawley, the expressman, to go up to the ranch and get my trunk and bring it to the station. He was to show the letter to Oliver as an order. I didn't think my husband would make any trouble about the trunk. I enclosed a silver fifty-cent piece from a very little hoard of coins I had, and posted the letter in the station box. It was the best arrangement I could think of. Anyhow, it was the only one. After that I stayed outside, walking up and down in the dark. I couldn't be still a minute. My own face in the glass there in the waiting-room had looked strange to me, excited and wild, with red spots like paint on my cheeks and all the rest pale, the eyes big and black—they're only a sort of hazel.

I stayed outside but watched all the time for the ticket window to be opened. A buckboard drove up while I stood there. At the sound of the wheels my heart first stood still, and then began beating till it seemed I would choke. I don't know what I feared; my instinct was to get into the station and to Boyce. I hesitated, afraid to cross the light; then ran ahead and almost bumped into a man getting down and having two dogs and some suit-cases handed after him. Well-dressed, gloved—just some stranger—nothing to be afraid of.

I went back to my walking up and down while the boy carried the luggage inside and stayed with it. I soon forgot all about the man, and it was not till a good while later

that I realised he was walking up and down out there, too, smoking, the dogs at his heels, and that he continually met me, "accidentally," in the full light of the door or window. I took a good look at him with the light directly on his face as he went in to put the dogs on leash and leave them with the boy. I recognised him. In the hills above Junction City there were several magnificent mountain camps and bungalows belonging to rich people. A year ago Alvah Pendleton's son had spent his honeymoon in the finest of these, built by his father. The pictures of bride and groom were in the papers, and a San Francisco weekly came as near making open mention of various scandals connected with Alvah Pendleton, Jr., the groom, as it could without being sued.

I recognised the odd little forward duck of his sleek, dark head as, coming back, he lifted his hat and said:

"It's a fine evening."

"Yes," I responded nervously, and turned in at the door.

He came in after me. I went across to the ticket window and stood there with my back to him. Then all at once I was ashamed of the way I was acting. Why shouldn't any man say to me that it was a pleasant evening? When he spoke again I was ready to answer him civilly. What he said this time was:

"Your ticket man at Meaghers doesn't open his window till just before the train comes." He threw his cigarette away, strolled up and leaned an elbow on the little shelf. "Not used to travelling? You get over being nervous about little things when you go as much as I do. What's this ticket of yours going to be?" He smiled, and his dark eyes, lazy, yet keen, travelled over my shabbiness and came back to my face. "A local or a through?"

I drew back a little, hesitating.

"Why, what difference——"

He laughed out now, but not unpleasantly; he didn't seem to be making fun of me. Yet when a woman has

been for years continually called fool, openly or by implication, she is shy of being laughed at. There is a sore place where there used to be reasonable acceptance of good-natured joking.

"It takes a short time to make out a local ticket, and a long time to make out a through," he explained.

"San Vicente," I said. "Is that local or through?"

"Local. That's where I'm going. I live there."

"Well," I looked at the clock, "he'll only have two tickets to make out."

He shook his head.

"Not even that. I've got mine already. In fact," he finished, on a lower tone, after a little hesitation, "it happens that I've got two tickets to San Vicente," and left it at that.

I hardly knew what to say. I couldn't accept the ticket outright; but if he would let me buy it at a reduction, it would help ever so much. Even without a Pullman berth—that I did want for Boyce's sake—my fare would be six dollars. When I didn't speak, he pulled out his watch and glanced at it.

"Anyhow," he said, "what's the use of hanging around? This old ticket window isn't going to be open for ten minutes." He smiled straight in my face. "It's awfully close in here. You look warm and tired. Come on outside."

He took hold of my arm easily. It was as though with the words and gesture he crossed over on to an acknowledged footing of friendliness. There seemed nothing to do but go with him. Yet at the door I held back.

"I oughtn't to leave the window now," I said.

He laughed, and pulled me along.

"Don't I tell you I've got two tickets to San Vicente? If I make you lose the chance to get yours, what's the matter with your using this extra one of mine?"

I was too confused, too inexperienced, to clear matters between us. I knew fairly well that I ought to tell him I

recognised him, yet if I did that, I should have to give my own name—and I was afraid to. He continued to hold my arm as we walked up and down the long platform, with its patches of light just in front of the station, the abrupt darkness swallowing up everything beyond its edges. He dropped the matter of the ticket as though it were settled. As we threaded our way among baggage trucks and piled boxes, and circled around the stack of milk cans at the farther end, I tried in vain to find some excuse for loosening that uncalled-for hold on my arm; and I could no more ask him, in so many words, if he would sell me the ticket, and what the price would be, than if I had been dumb. He talked right along in his smooth, careless voice, not seeming to notice anything out of the way about me. Finally he pulled up in the light of the door, and suggested easily:

“Suppose we introduce ourselves; here’s my card.”

“I haven’t any card,” I said, twisting the bit of pasteboard between my fingers, without looking at it.

He smiled suddenly.

“Of course you haven’t—nor any name, either! Oh, I’ve got you spotted, kiddo. You’re running away from home.”

“What—” I gasped— “What makes you say that?”

He chuckled at my face of dismay.

“Why, it sticks out all over you, girly! You’ll just have to use that extra ticket of mine. If you go to buying one, the agent will spot you for a runaway, just as I did.”

I couldn’t speak.

“And when papa and mamma get on your track to-morrow, the first thing they’ll want to know is where you bought a railroad ticket for.”

Oh, the gulf between me and that foolish, headstrong girl for whom he took me!

“He knows where I’ve gone,” I gulped. “I told him in the note—to San Vicente—to get a divorce.”

"Sa-a-aay!" he whistled softly, and took a new look at me. "We-e-ell—who'd have thought it?—a baby doll like you!"

Without a word I began to edge away toward the station door. A long step brought him in front of me. There was a new look in his eye. He was flushed, voluble, like a man who had taken a drink.

"See here," his voice was unsteady, "if there's an injured husband on your trail, it's the extra ticket for yours. Come now—you'll have to!"

The whistle of the coming train cut short his speech; next moment its thunders shook the little station. I pushed past him and looked in. The ticket window was open—it must have been open for some time. Young Pendleton held me back with one hand. He called to the boy to bring the dogs and luggage. Then to me he whispered:

"Honey, I hate to leave you, but I've got to run down to the baggage car and see that these pups get on. Get your things and follow my grips. It's all right—it's all right. Section 8, first Pullman. Run along—quick. Be a good girl."

This is a free country. Any citizen can accept or reject the proposition of any other citizen. What is it then which terrifies a woman so in a situation like this? I tore from his grasp as though it had power to harm me; I ran from him, dashed through the waiting-room, and gathered up my baby. As I flew, money in hand, to get my ticket, he met me at the inner door.

"What's the matter—?" he was beginning, when he caught sight of Boyce! His astonishment and dismay were almost comical. He stood there between me and the window. "A—a child!" he stuttered. "Is—that—your——?"

"Get out of my way!" I cried, desperately. "Let me buy my ticket."

The boy with the dogs and luggage hung at the outer door and stared. My persecutor backed off.

"Take those pups down to the baggage car, you fool," he shouted and rushed away.

The throb and jar of that waiting train excited me unreasonably. No time to buy a ticket now. I would have to pay on the train. I was beside myself. I turned and ran to get the suit-case, and heard them call, "All aboard!" while I was lifting it. When I got out to the platform Pendleton was standing on the car step, the wheels already beginning to grind. I saw his ungloved right hand passing a coin down to the boy who had carried his grips. The wheels moved faster. Alone, I might have climbed on; but with Boyce and the suit-case I was afraid to attempt it. I stood there and saw the train leave me.

CHAPTER II

THE FLIGHT

STUMBLED back into the station. This man—nothing to me nor I to him—had come in my way with his foolish overtures—and lost me my train! Yet at the moment there wasn't room in me for anger against him; all other feelings were swallowed up in the tragedy of that missed train.

Boyce slept like a log. I went and beat on the closed ticket window. I could hear the telegraph instrument clicking away in there, but I was afraid that with the going of the train everybody had left the station. After a long time the board shutter was jerked up; there was the agent, his hat on a corner of his head, one arm in a sleeve of the coat he was hunching into. He looked at me very crossly.

"Missed your train? There won't be another till five o'clock to-morrow morning."

He was going to slam down the shutter, but I put my hand in at the risk of having my fingers pinched.

"Wait a minute," I begged. "Isn't there a train that comes through here at twelve?—a train that goes to San Vicente, California?"

"Yes, there is—the Shasta Limited to San Francisco—through express. It doesn't stop."

Again he was going to pull the window down. Again I stopped him desperately.

"Couldn't it be flagged?"

"No, it couldn't. Is that all? It's after my hours, now. Five o'clock to-morrow morning's the best you can do—unless you want to try walking to the Junction. Take your hand away."

With that, he slammed the window down, indeed.

For a minute I stood, holding to the shelf, staring at the white painted boards of the shutter. I heard his heavy, clumping step cross the floor, and the outer door shut, leaving me alone in the station. I was like a person who has had a blow on the head. No useful thought or suggestion came to me. I just went and sat down by the suit-case and the sleeping baby. There I sat, in a sort of stupor; and when I tried to think of any plan, there only thumped over and over in my mind the thought that it was all my fault—"If I hadn't spoken to that man—if I hadn't let him speak to me! All my fault—all my fault!"

There was a big clock, and it ticked very loud. I realized that the wind had freshened, and was coming through the open door. I covered Boycè mechanically. After all that I had done and tried in these last months, after that final struggle, there seemed nothing to do but sit and wait. And that's what I did, for more than an hour.

What finally roused me like a slap in the face was the sight of Flegel's gold-piece still clutched in my hand. The Flegels—five o'clock was the milk train—they would be down to it. Oliver would have had my note before that; he might be there, too. I couldn't bear it. I got up and lifted the suit-case. Six miles to the Junction. Out of the question to walk that far. I looked at the clock; the hands were close together at the top—almost time for the Limited.

I became suddenly aware of a queer trembling through me—yet I felt strong with it, not weak. My own efforts had failed; now something from outside seemed to take hold of me, and move me about—quick, skillful, unhesitating. The Shasta Limited, away down below the cut, whistled for Meaghers. I caught up Boyce, took him out and laid him, sleeping as he was, on a baggage truck close beside the track, flew back for my suit-case, set it by him, jerking down a poster from the wall as I passed, ran a

little way along the track to where the first tall electric light would give the engineer a good view of my figure, and stood there. When the train came out of the cut at the foot of the valley I began to wave my poster across the tracks. It was half a mile away then, coming like a cannon-ball, but I waved frantically, till they saw me, and I could see and hear the speed slackening. Then I threw down the cardboard sheet, turned and ran the few rods back to the station, and was waiting there with my baby and my baggage when the great train came to a grinding halt at the platform and two or three men jumped down demanding to know what was the matter.

In the confusion, I scrambled on, and was in the vestibule of one of the Pullmans—the train carried no other kind of cars—while they swore and hammered on the station door, and tried to find who had flagged them, and why.

For a minute they ran around like men fighting a fire; then I heard the shout, "All aboard!" and the conductor came jumping into the vestibule where I was, grabbed the bell rope and pulled it. The wheels were moving before he saw me—that saved me from being put off the train.

"Good Lord!" he snapped, stopping there with his arm raised, staring down at me. "Was it you children that flagged my train? You ought to be whipped!"

I stood up meekly, and he saw the length of my skirts.

"A woman gown," he said astonished, "and don't know any better than that?"

"I'm sorry," I answered. "I just had to get this train."

"Had to get this train!" he spluttered. "Well, madam, do you know that you have trifled with the lives of hundreds of people? We don't dare lose or gain a minute, madam. The next time you run out and wave a petticoat at a train because you want to ride on it, I wish you'd choose the local."

The brakeman came up behind and stood listening with

a boy's grin. He was a young fellow with reckless, light blue eyes under his visored cap, and not enough chin to warrant them. From behind the conductor's shoulder he gave me a wink of encouragement. I let the angry man scold me like a father—or a Dutch Uncle. When he was through, he seemed relieved, for he turned all at once to the brakeman and asked if there was any more comfortable place than the vestibule for me to sit, adding:

"We can't afford to stop again. She's on here and going to stay. You may as well look after her, Tipton. She'll have to have some place to lay this kid, anyhow."

"Sure," and the boy ducked into the Pullman.

"I haven't the money for a berth," I said hastily; "only a little more than enough for my fare to San Vicente."

Good old conductor, whose name I never knew—his bark was so much worse than his bite!

"I can't accept a money fare to San Vicente," he grumbled. "This is a through train—got nothing but through tickets. How'd a local money fare look in my accounts?"

Something almost like a smile passed between us.

"I'd be perfectly willing to pay," I said. "I know it was outrageous of me to stop your train. But I just *had* to—I'm going down to San Vicente to get work."

He gave me a long look; I guess he "spotted" me, too, as the man at the station put it. Then his eye finally settled on Boyce.

"Fine boy you've got there. Going to get work, hey? Well, if you show the nerve holding up San Vicente you did in holding up my train, you'll make it."

He went on. I offer my thanks to him here. I hadn't the wit to do it then, nor would he have wanted me to.

The brakeman came strolling back with that light-hearted air of his, followed by a tall, broad-framed very black man, who looked as though he had just been waked up, and said airily.

"Bice'll let the kid sleep on the seat where he is."

The negro bowed to me gravely, his eyes fastening themselves on Boy, who was awake now and standing beside me. He bent to pick the child up, and I got a blast of whiskey breath that showed me why the man's eyeballs were so reddened. I thought Boy would be afraid of him, but he put up his arms instantly and cuddled down on the broad hollow shoulder. We all started back into the Pullman, the young brakeman whispering to me as we went.

"Bice just got fired—on the wing, as it were—for drinking."

"Oh," I said, looking at the big, kind creature carrying Boy, "what a pity!"

"Yep," assented the brakeman. "He was a star porter, but the railroad don't stand for John Barleycorn. He and the brakeman smuggled in a bottle, and they fired 'em both—picked me up at Silver Hill to make the run back, and grabbed a coon there to take Bice's place. They'll carry him on to San Francisco and turn him loose."

The black man put my son down on his own folded overcoat. He handled the child deftly; the liquor seemed only to make him more dignified, as it does some people.

"Will the lady wish this seat?" he asked when Boy, comfortably placed, lapsed again into slumber.

His speech startled me. It was a big voice brought down to a beautiful whisper (we were in the end of a Pullman full of sleeping passengers), and the negro's pronunciation was that of an English gentleman. He was offering me the only place he himself had to sit.

"Oh, no, thank you," I said. "I'll take the camp-stool out in the vestibule if it won't be too much trouble for you to look after my little boy here."

"No trouble, madam," he said, then dropped into the seat like a thing whose mechanism has run down, his head went back, and he began to snore almost instantly.

I was loosening Boyce's shoes when the child suddenly opened his eyes wide.

"We on train!" he exclaimed as though just realising it. "Where's Boy's candy?"

"Oh, Boy—" I began, but the brakeman took the words out of my mouth.

"Sure," he said, "you're dead right, young man—this is a train, and your candy's in the next car. I'll get it for you."

"Now?"

Boy's eyes were closing as he spoke; he was asleep when I tucked his shoes in beside him.

I shook my hand to the brakeman, breathing softly:

"No need to get any candy. See. I'll buy some to-morrow."

"Yes, you won't," was the whispered answer. "I'll get the kid's candy. I don't want anything of his size bawling me out for not keeping my promises. Gee, he's a good looker! Got eyes like his mamma."

He carried the stool out for me. After I was seated on it in a corner of the vestibule, he stood looking at me a minute, then reached over and tried the big brass lever that lets down the floor to open the vestibule. I watched him dully.

"Sometimes they throw themselves in front of engines," he explained; "sometimes they throw themselves off of the trains; but either way, I'm ag'in it."

I smiled a little, and he went on, seeming rather relieved in his mind. He was gone some time, and when he came back brought the candy, and put it in my lap, suggesting:

"Have some yourself."

"Thank you," I said, "I couldn't eat—but I'm awfully thirsty."

He nodded.

"Sort of like me. If I had as good an appetite as I have a thirst, I'd be bigger than Bice. Ain't he a whale? West Indian darkey from San Domingo; been butler in me lud's family down in those parts, and steward on a big mail

steamer; but he couldn't get it through his nut that when the railroad said 'Nix on the alcohol' it meant nix."

"Is it all right to leave the child with him?" I asked a trifle anxiously.

"Sure it's all right. The poor old ginny's as gentle as a kitten. Drink only makes him more polite. When I came through there just now the kid had waked up and asked for something. Bice was waiting on him like he was the heir apparent to the throne. I tell you the tourists used to feel as though it was a privilege to be allowed to slip him a five-dollar tip."

"I—I know so little of such things," I stammered. "How much ought I to give him for letting Boy sleep on the seat there?"

"Nothing. He's down and out himself, you see—he's not the porter. It makes him feel kind of good to get a chance to do something for somebody. Don't you offer him money. He's not like the common run of darkies."

"He did look very different to me," I said; "so big, and so very black; yet his features are almost sharp."

"He's a Kaffir," nodding. "I was born on a Virginia plantation. Down there I used to hear them talk about Kaffirs. Always said they couldn't use one in the fields—except for a boss. They won't mind anybody but a white man, you see—or a white lady—but they made fine butlers and stewards. Get one of 'em roused and he's got all sorts of fool courage—you could whip him to death before he'd give up. I'll bring you that drink now—I guess it's time."

He fetched the water, and watched me drink. As I handed back the empty glass with thanks, he remarked:

"I ain't asking what your sorrow was, but I am inquiring if broken doses of conversation might relieve it. Yes? Introductions are in order. My name's Joe Tipton, of San Vicente, California. Pleased to make your acquaintance. Mrs.—er—er—ump—ump?"

He paused with raised eyebrows. I laughed and filled in, "Mrs. C. A. Baird."

"And the C. A. stands for California, America."

"You pretty nearly guessed it." The boy's dare-devil air would have disarmed anyone. "My father named me California for the state he was born in, and my mother added Ann to it. Most people call me Callie."

"Nup," young Tipton shook his head. "I never should. I've got a name for you. California's too long a handle."

He didn't say what his name for me was, and I didn't ask. He kept coming back every once in a while, and on one of these visits I questioned him concerning San Vicente.

"It's a pretty good old burg," he said. "About forty thousand—give the Chamber of Commerce a couple of drinks and they'll claim eighty, but forty's nearer the figure. Got many friends there?"

"No," I said, hastily. "I only know two people in San Vicente—a Mr. and Mrs. Watkins."

"Well—they'll meet you at the station, will they? San Vicente ain't London, but it's a kind of a wicked big town for one little lone bunch of calico."

"Oh, no," I said, "they don't know anything about my coming. I haven't seen either of them for nearly seven years. I knew them back in Stanleyton."

"What are you going to do then?" Joe asked. "Not that I want to pry; but I'm just determined to find out."

"Why, I must get an inexpensive boarding-house and then look for work."

He stood silent, shaking his head.

"Oh, say," he began, hesitantly, "it would be too bad for you to have to go to a beanery."

"I'm used to economizing," was all I said to that.

"But, you see, a dame with your looks—all alone—at a place like that; take it from me——"

The engine whistle broke in on his speech with some

signal which sent him hurrying away. When he was gone the memory of those silly, slangy words, "A dame with your looks," kept me a kind of pleasant company. One would have said they were as free and impertinent as Pendleton's "a baby doll," yet Pendleton's speech had repelled and scared me, and I got no feeling of offence from what this boy said and did. He praised my looks. How long, how long since I had given thought to them! Certainly not since mother died. I spread my hands out on my threadbare skirt. They were still soft and little and white—the palms not much calloused. Through all the slavery of the ranch I had kept up the care of them that mother always made so much of, washing them in buttermilk, protecting them from the rough work with old gloves—though there was nobody now to notice and approve, as she used to do. Nights when she was so worn out that she would fairly go to sleep on her tired feet she would stand and brush my curls. She wanted me, even after I was married, to let them hang, because it was good for the hair she said, but I knew it was because she was so proud of them.

Poor little mother, sleeping so quietly on the Oregon hill there beside father, while her girl, with the curls all tucked in under a cheap hat of two summers back faced the world with just those two small, bare hands between herself and starvation!

We roared on through the night. That song of the wheels, "Going away!" "Going away!" that always comes to the unaccustomed traveller, was loud in my ears. I had done it at last. I was off. How many years of slow misery, what hours of frenzied revolt had gone to the making of this moment! The speed of the train hurling through the dark stimulated me. I shouldn't be any further from Meaghers because I was going so fast, yet somehow it seemed as though I should.

Meaghers—I thought of the Flegels. I went over in

my mind the scene at their house; my trouble afterward with young Pendleton at the station made it clearer to me. That article in the weekly had given me hint enough about Alvah Pendleton's son—if it were needed, and I could see how his manner had instantly changed when he found that I was one of the women who can't come under the ordinary rules; not a wife with a husband to speak up for her, nor a girl to be approached with some little indirection. I must realise now that my position was anomalous; some people wouldn't want to be mixed up with me, others would think they could take liberties. Well, I hadn't expected it would be easy.

A dreary prospect? My heart rose to it, shook its wings like a poor cage-bird that has made escape, and yet has no reason—save the bare one of the existence of those wings—to believe that it can fly. I looked with a sort of tragic amusement toward the great brass lever that Joe Tipton had examined so uneasily. They threw themselves under the engines and off the trains, did they? Not the mother animal with its young to live for!

The brakeman came loitering back and studied me briefly with his casual, sidelong glance, before he inquired.

"Well, how's every little thing?"

"Fine," I answered him, and really meant it. "It's good that I get into San Vicente in the early morning. I'll have all day to look for a place."

"Say." He hesitated, then cocked his cap to one side and went on, "I believe I've got hold of the dandy scheme for you. I want to send you to mother."

I had a vision of the widowed Virginia lady in her tiny cot.

"Will she have room for me?"

"Plenty. My two weeks' vacation starts when I leave this train at Frisco." He fished out a card. "You can take that to mother, and she'll let you use my room while I'm away."

On the card he put in my hand was printed, "The Poinsettia, Arbolado Street at Fortieth, San Vicente, California. Mrs. Col. Joseph Edwards Tipton, late of Greenbriar Springs, Va., proprietress."

"It's a classy place," he assured me. "The handsomest house on Arbolado street—dago artist built it to look like his ancestral castle at Bingen on the Rhine—and went broke on it. Mother gets it cheap, and she's got a bunch of swell dames for boarders. It's the very hang-out for you."

"Oh, but I couldn't afford such a place!"

"Forget it," he waved a hand. "There's no money in the deal. You're walking right back to the old homestead this time with your cheild in your arms, and the paper snow coming down, to soft music. I won't be in San Vicente for two weeks. That'll give you time to size up the situation and see what you can do."

"You're very kind," I said.

"Oh, I don't know." He took the card from my hand again, and began scribbling on it. "My room's a fright. I'm telling mother to sort of hoe it out and let you into it."

"What will she think?"

"It doesn't pay to think, where I'm concerned—Mother knows that. I've brought her up right. Say—I wish I could be there to see when you drop in on the bunch at the Poinsettia! Those dear old girls certainly are one grove of nuts. I have some right good fun with 'em. I sure would admire to be among those present when they get the first view of you—and the kid!"

"Why—?" I began, but he broke in on me rather hastily:

"When you get to San Vicente you take the Arbolado street-car on the corner northeast of the station, unless you have the luck to catch a jitney. Give your check to the baggage man. He'll look after your trunk."

"My—my trunk isn't here," I said in some embarrassment. "It's to come later."

"Who's attending to it?"

"The driver at Meaghers. He'll send it on as soon as I give him an address."

"I could save you the express on it," said the brakeman. "The man that's taking my regular run could bring it down to San Vicente without it costing you anything."

"I oughtn't to let you do that, but——"

"You should worry! It's not a cent out of my pocket." I did love the neat way he freed me from all gratitude. "I always enjoy making other folks work."

"Well—then—all right," I said, and began to add some halting words of thanks. But he seemed not to hear them, and only said, before he strolled away, and with that boy's grin of his:

"'Well, that chore's chored,' as the Yankee woman said when she poisoned her husband. See you later."

So it came about that I climbed down from the Shasta Limited at San Vicente in the blue coolness of dawn. I was wearily from my sleepless night in the vestibule, yet less frightened and shaken than I had expected to be. There were some other passengers getting off, a family group, with the regular porter of the car looking after them. Joe Tipton had warned me that he would be busy elsewhere, but the big black man, Bice, attended on me as though I had been a queen. He wouldn't let me touch a thing to carry it. He had washed and combed Boyce in the Pullman dressing-room, and he brought the child out riding on his arm with a stately air that made it look like a ceremonial. I remembered Joe's caution about not offering him money.

"Thank you—thank you ever so much," I said. "You have been awfully good to my little boy and me."

"I was glad to do it for you, madam," his deep, courteous voice answered. "The little gentleman is mighty sweet. I hope I may be able to serve you and him again—some other time."

He had carried my suit-case to the station door. The train began to move as he was setting it down. He regained the platform with a very few long strides, and the last view Boyce and I had of him, was standing big and black and forlorn on the rear platform looking back to us.

CHAPTER III

THE DOOR THAT OPENED TO ME

DAWN in the streets of San Vicente. The roar of the train was still in my head, its jar and movement through all my flesh. Here it was still, cool, empty, under the growing light. Boy pulled at my hand.

"Muvver—are we—there?"

I tried to answer him, but tears stung under my eyelids; my throat swelled. We were "there." The journey was made—that train had gone on. I was free. Freedom—a splendour but a terror. Freedom to do what? To starve, maybe. No, no—I wouldn't fail—with Boyce, I daren't. Here was a whole town full of people—I'd find friends—a new start—a new chance.

"What you crying for? Where hurts?" Boy swung round in front of me, clutching my skirts, staring up into my face, scared.

"Nothing—I'm just so happy," I said, half scared myself to find tears on my cheeks. I wiped them away, and smiled. Boy was quick enough to believe me and forget them in the great adventure.

I didn't see any car with ARBOLADO on it; no jitney passed, though we stood a long time at the corner Joe Tipton had described. I began to realise that I was very hungry. I had been too excited to touch food at supper last night—across from Oliver, where I should never sit again! For days before that I had scarcely eaten anything. Now that I stood free, new-born in a world of my own, I was one great hunger.

"Jackie-Boy," I said, "would you like to walk up to the new place?" and we started along the silent street. At first everything was closed, except some drug-store or all-night saloon; then as we walked block after block, five, six,

eight, ten of them, there began to be bungalows, with milk bottles on their steps a woman sweeping the walk, a man using the garden hose, a child running on an early morning errand.

"It's pretty far," Boy said. "Is breakfast there?"

"Yes, son," I laughed a little; "it has to be there." And after that he timed his short steps to the phrase.

We were both tired enough before we reached the big house which I recognised half a block away from Joe Tipton's description. It certainly looked queer at the corner of a city street, with its shingled towers, battlements, red sandstone bastions, and a cloistered arcade. It seemed there should have been a drawbridge and moat, instead of the usual stone steps and a front doorbell.

A neat girl in a blue cotton maid's dress answered my ring, and looked a little doubtful when I asked for Mrs. Tipton.

"If she isn't up yet—" I hesitated, realising that I was in town where people wouldn't be keeping ranch hours.

"She's up," the maid vouchsafed. "She's in the kitchen," and I questioned:

"Could I go there and speak to her a minute? Or would you give her this?" and I put forward Joe's card.

The girl took it, turned it over and read that boyish scrawl: "Dear Mother: Making Shasta Limited run. Hoe out my room, and let the little lady and the kid have it. Won't be home for two weeks."

"Oh," she said, "Joe Ed sent you."

A fragrance of coffee began to diffuse itself upon the air. My four-year-old wrinkled his button nose, demanding:

"Is this the place where we get breakfast, Muvver? You said it had to be."

"Huh," the girl lingered, muttering. "Joe Ed sent you here with that kid—the young devil! He knows better than that. Well—come in and sit down. I'll call Mrs. Tipton."

This was certainly a puzzling reception. I looked about me. The hall was a big, square room with rugs on the floor, a piano, and a great fireplace of rough boulders in front of which, but not too close, there was a table with books and magazines, a lot of rocking chairs drawn up toward the hearth, and at one side a long seat with cushions, swung by chains from the ceiling. There was an air of homelike comfort a little different from what I had expected in a fashionable boarding-house.

Over the mantel was a portrait of a man in Confederate uniform. Below it a sheathed sword hung by its wide, knitted, silken sash, and a colonel's hat, with its insignia.

"Mrs. Baird?"

The singular voice that spoke to me, technically a falsetto, I suppose, yet had none of the forced, shrill quality we associate with that word. It was like a little flute very softly blown. I turned to see a woman whom I recognised at once as Joe Tipton's mother. Though her eyes were brown, they had something the same adventurous gleam as his, and the short chin seemed less inadequate on a feminine face. She looked to be under fifty, and must surely have been the very young wife of her Confederate colonel. I got up and went toward her, beginning to explain.

"Your son sent me. He thought I could have his room for a day or two till I can get settled."

"Yes?" Again the soft little flute-like voice surprised me. "Well,—you might come up and look at it." She smiled Joe Ed's own light-hearted smile. "I'm not sure that you can get in—Eddie has a way of leaving his things scattered all over the place, and we never clean it till the last minute before he's expected."

Boy and I followed her up the stairs. The room was at the back of the house, on the third floor; a kitchen chimney came up close outside its one window, cutting off all the view and most of the light. The room was full of man—
young man—wild, careless boy. It reeked of masculinity.

Even my husband-accustomed senses felt it. Cigarette butts and ash were everywhere. The half-open closet door showed soiled shirts and collars pitched on the floor, kicked into a heap but springing and rolling about as collars will. The carpet was worn, faded and pieced, made over from the leavings of a larger room; the old articles of furniture all more or less out of repair.

Bless the boy, with reckless kindness he had offered me this frowsy, neglected place as confidently as though it had been the best room in the house. And, oh, I was thankful.

"Well," with another edition of J  e Ed's smile Mrs. Tipton repeated the soft, sliding monosyllable she had used in the hall below, "do you think you could stay here?"

For answer my suit-case fell thumping from my hand. I sank on a chair—and Boy instantly climbed onto my lap with that boring in of hard little knees which tired mothers know so well.

"Is this where we going to stay, Muvver?" he demanded, kneeling on my lap, a fist on each side of my neck, staring straight into my eyes. "Will there be breakfast here?"

Mrs. Tipton turned at the door with a graceful air of leave-taking. She surveyed the room, me and my child, making no comment on Boyce, as the servant-girl had done. Her courteous silence somehow made me a little uneasy. I felt that there was something back of the situation, and I hastened to say:

"Your son only offered to let me stay in the room because he was not occupying it. I didn't expect to get my meals here."

"Yes? You look tired—and the little boy—I think I can spare Orma to bring you up a tray with some coffee, and some oatmeal and milk."

When she was gone and the door shut I began automatically to pick up things and put the room to rights, when Boy called me from the window:

"Muvver, come look at little house."

I went and stood behind his bobbing head. The back yard down there was a beautiful, secluded place; shut in from the side street by a ten-foot cypress hedge, separated from the other sides by tall board party fence covered with vines and masked by shrubbery, and from the Poinsettia itself, even in that limited space, by a thicket of bamboo. In the midst, a tiny bungalow, wrapped, tied about, bundled in a great wistaria vine, almost filled our narrow field of vision. It was a little nest, a quiet, green hermitage. Through its diamond-paned window Jackie-Boy's sharp eyes spied out a man sitting at table.

"Me, too, Muvver—Boycie's hungry, too," he instantly began, on so loud a note that I had to hush him. But a welcome knock on the door interrupted us, and the maid came in with our tray.

"I brought your breakfast up here, because—" she was beginning when Boy turned with a shout and ran toward it. "Lady, you'll have to keep him quieter than that," she concluded. "Didn't the Mrs. speak to you about it?"

"Why, no," I said, uneasily.

She put the tray on the bed, the only possible clear place to set it down. I began to get Boyce's oatmeal ready as fast as I could, making a seat for him of the suit-case and using one of the chairs for a table. When you are preparing food for a hungry child you pay very little attention to what is going on about you; but with Boyce finally settled, I noticed that the girl was still lingering, and evidently had something more to say. As I glanced up at her—the servant girl in the house is always hungry for someone to talk to—she began, a little deprecatingly:

"You know you're right over Mrs. Thrasher's room here."

"Mrs. Thrasher?"

"Yes. She's the owner. She doesn't allow Mrs. Tipton to take any children."

"Mrs. Tipton didn't say anything about it to me," I repeated rather blankly.

Boyce was spooning away in perfect contentment, while I let my breakfast get cold.

"Ain't that just like her?" inquired the girl in an ag-grieved tone. "Left it to me to tell you. Listen: my sister's little girl came in from the ranch last month to have her eyes fitted with glasses—good, decent kid, about eleven. Could I have her stay with me? I could not. But the Mrs. didn't say a word to me about it; she just turned loose them old cats on me."

"Do you mean the boarders?"

"The boarders *and* Mrs. Thrasher. That old woman sure is one devil, esquire. She can't live with her husband. She won't get a divorce from him nor let him have one. She's got a separation, and half the money. She pinches a nickel till the buffalo kicks. She made it so hot for me while I had Fay here that I had to run the kid off between two days and telegraph my sister."

"Do they all—are they all like that?" I was bewildered. "What's the matter with them?"

"The devil," said Orma. "They've got nothing to do but sit around and kick. They complain to the Mrs. of me, or of Addie's cooking—talk to me when I'm doing their rooms—jump on Mrs. T.—backbite each other." Her eye glanced around the walls. "You ought to hear Joe Ed set 'em up. He's got a nickname for every one of 'em."

So this was what young Tipton meant by saying that he would admire to be there when the dear old girls got their first view of me—and the kid! A buzzer sounded from below, two short calls.

"There's the only boarder in the house that ain't a crank." Orma dived for her towel, which she had dropped on back of Boyce's table-chair. "She's a lady. If you do anything for her you get paid. You'd like Miss Eugenia Chandler."

The door shut after her, and I heard her hurrying footsteps on the stairs. I turned to my breakfast. Whatever the situation, I must eat. Boy was chasing the last drop of cream round and round in the bottom of his oatmeal bowl. He looked up to say to me with the satisfied, replete air of a fed child.

"'S good."

"Yes, dear, it is," I agreed. It was a beautiful meal—amber coffee, with cream; eggs, bacon, hot biscuits, all exquisitely served. As I finished it I began to hear moving about on the floor below me, the opening and shutting of doors. Boy, having slept and breakfasted, was ready for play. He began to investigate things, promptly knocked the hairbrush off the bureau, and it fell clattering.

"You must be quiet, dear," I cautioned.

"Why?"

"The people in this house aren't used to little boys."

"They can't hear me. I fink I play train-o'-cars."

"No, no, Boy; you mustn't."

"Huh!" He squared up before me, full of resistance; I looked about me for a sufficient argument.

"Mother's head aches. I didn't sleep any last night, Jackie-Boy, you see. I want to sleep now."

"Can I cure your head?" he bargained; playing doctor was at least something.

Once down on the bed, I realised how desperately tired and sleepy I was. I lay there and let him dribble a sopped towel over my forehead, where there began to be plenty of ache. The water ran down my shirtwaist; the feeling of the cool moisture, on shoulder and arm, reminded me with a sort of passive uneasiness that I had only one more clean blouse in my suit-case. Men say that life presents itself to women mostly as a matter of clothes. Well—it is a woman who gets the little garments ready for us before we come here; it is a woman who struggles to have us clean and properly clad as other people's children. A girl's

pretty dresses may mean every opportunity in life for her; a woman can't go anywhere or be anybody unless she has decent things to wear. A man is estimated upon what he is, and a woman upon how she looks. As I lay there on Joe Tipton's generously offered, tobacco-smelling bed, with my head humming, and Boyce lovingly prodding the corner of a wet towel in my eye, I couldn't think of anything much but the fact that I oughtn't to have lain down in my suit, the only thing I possessed fit to be seen on town streets—and that it wasn't fit.

Yet I must have gone to sleep almost at once and slept soundly. I wakened to the sound of the big stairway clock striking eleven, and the murmur of Boy's little half-sung play talk—he was used to making his own amusements. I lay there a moment thinking. I knew what I had to do. I must get up and go over every stitch of my clothes, brushing and cleaning, the same with Boy's, then wash and dress us both with the unusual care that makes a great difference, even with shabby old things. When I got up and began the work, Boy welcomed me as though from a long journey. I was nearly done when Orma came in for the tray. Boy hailed her as a relief.

"Who lives in little house?" he demanded, twisting free and running, to the window.

"Mr. Dale." Standing beside the child, she ran a finger through one of his curls. "You going out with your mamma to get lunch?"

"Yep." Said Boyce. I stood pinning on my hat before the bureau.

"There's a nice little dairy lunch just around the corner on Forty-third street," she suggested.

"Thank you, that'll be handy," I said, and we all went together through the door, and down the first flight of stairs. When we came to the second-floor landing, where she would take the back stairs and we the front, she glanced down into the hall with a sort of chuckle. A little,

long-faced, dried-up looking old lady was fluttering around the newel post, peering up at us.

"There's Miss Creevey," said the maid. "She gave Mr. Dale her book that she wrote—The History of Modoc County in Rhyme." I was moving on when she caught my sleeve to whisper, "She paid to have that book printed, Joe Ed says. There's one of 'em on the hall table. Sure nobody ever bought 'em."

She went on down the back stairs, and we faced front. A sudden timidity fell on Boyce and me as we began to descend. He caught hold of my hand, and pushed in against my skirts. The little old lady let go the newel post and backed away.

They were gathered in the hall waiting for the dining-room to be opened for lunch. Mrs. Tipton sat at her little desk near the foot of the stairs, and just outside of the dining-room door. They all looked up at us. Conversation ceased abruptly. My son and I arrived amid utter silence. It is impossible to see anything when you face a roomful of people who are gazing at you. I got a confused impression of eight or ten middle-aged women, well-dressed, and one small white-haired, whiskered old man, who seemed somehow almost as little like a real man as any of them. They grouped around the fire, though it was a fine, sunny day, continuing to stare at me and my child as though we had been stray animals who had gotten in by mistake. I nodded to them in general, and as I passed Mrs. Tipton said to her:

"We are going out for lunch."

"Shall you be in to dinner?" she inquired airily.

I was taken aback. There was no ignoring the hostility of the others.

"Why—" I stammered, "Shall I? I didn't know—I thought—"

I broke off. Mrs. Tipton sat smiling her incorrigible smile and saying:

"Oh, I guess we can give you some dinner."

"Thank you. I'll be here," and I went on. But as I passed through the swinging curtains at the vestibule and began to fumble with the big front door latch, I heard somebody inquire, in awful tones:

"Who was that?" And before any answer could be made, another:

"A new boarder?" Then most accusingly of all:

"Surely not—with that child!"

I tried to get away without hearing more; but Mrs. Tipton's clear, high tones brought me the answer she made to them:

"Oh, just a poor soul that Eddie sent here. Lunch is served, ladies. Eddie has a weakness for picking up oddities."

I jerked desperately at the door, turned the wrong way, and heard a sudden flutter and scuttling in the room behind the swinging curtains.

"There he is!"

"Mrs. Tutt, send Ermentrude out to ask him now."

"Quick—he'll get away!"

A fat little squab of a woman and a tall bony one came bolting into the vestibule, puffing the curtains apart so that I had a glimpse of the rest of the women all running to the big window at the south, staring out excitedly. As I lifted Boyce down the front steps, my face stinging as though it had been slapped, I saw the object of their excitement. The driveway which led to the back yard and the little bungalow was walled and roofed by a mat of vines, that made it a shadowy green tunnel. At this tunnel entrance stood a man—a very marked figure—leisurely drawing on his gloves. The tall woman, running past me, succeeded in encountering him. As I approached she was delivering in breathless tones some invitation or message.

At the moment, I believe, I saw and heard none of this. I was only in haste to get away from the scene of my

humiliation. An oddity? Well, I must look that way to them—these expensively-clothed, idle, respectable women, in their well-furnished life-boat, chopping away at my fingers when I tried not to drown.

“Wait, Muvver—don’t go so fast.” Boy brought me to myself as I was hurrying along Arbolado street.

CHAPTER IV

A STALLED OX

“OH—mother forgot, dear,” I said, and almost with a jerk brought my hurrying steps down to time with his short legs. But my mind kept on at a gallop; why hadn’t I realised how things would look from the outside? Why in the world hadn’t I gone straight to Delia Rogers? She had known me where I had some standing. Fifteen-year-old girl that I was then, I had been able to do her favours, and favours that she cared for. I was opposite one of those quiet little neighbourhood drug-stores at the moment; I hurried in on impulse and began feverishly looking through the W’s in the telephone book. There, one below the other, were two Harvey Watkinses.

“Boy’s hungry,” my son contributed to my confusion.

“Yes, dear—we’ll get lunch pretty soon.”

“Here?”

“No. Be still a minute, please.”

The first phone must be Harvey’s office—“The Cronin Building, Market St.” The second, his residence, had “Las Reudas” prefixed to its number.

The operator who took my call repeated to me several times, “I am ringing them.” Then, after awhile her voice came again over the wire, “They do not answer. Here’s your nickel,” and the coin rattled down in the slot and presented itself, though I should never have discovered it there had not Boy spied and demanded it.

I gave up Delia for the moment—I oughtn’t to burst in on her unannounced just at meal-time, anyhow—and found Orma’s little dairy lunch place on a side street where I could get something suitable for Boy; I, myself, was too anxious and disturbed to eat.

Coming back to the street after his meal a big, heavy street-car passed us with the name LAS REUDAS on it—the place must be a suburb. I would go out there.' Even if I didn't find Delia at home, it would be a nice ride and occupy the time; I could shove a note under her door. The encounter with the women at the Poinsettia kept reminding me rather quaintly of that interview with Mrs. Stanley, whose searing, freezing memory had never left me. With a sort of passivity I noted the difference in my present attitude. Then my opponent had but to rouse my foolish pride, and I flew to help her pull down my own card castles. Now, disciplined by life and with a child dependent upon me, I meant to go back to the boarding-house and accept, at its surface value, Mrs. Tipton's invitation for dinner. I was glad that I had come to that resolution even before I found difficulty in reaching Delia Rogers. Of course Delia would have interests, affairs, burdens of her own; children, too, having been married longer than I; yet it seemed not too much to hope that she might be able to put me at once in the way of helping myself. On the car Boyce readily gave up the telephone nickel for the sake of making his contribution to the stream of coins that the people were playing down into the glass box—it appeared you could have fun out of money in town.

We rolled out along palm-bordered streets. I was glad I had come. At Las Reudas, a little place up in the hills above San Vicente, we got off at a tiny station smothered in tall heliotropes and geraniums, a giant fuchsia with a trunk like a small tree hanging coral and purple clusters about the eaves. The wide, quiet streets and sidewalks of old Devonian red sandstone of a soft, dull-rose tint were beautiful against the green of smooth lawns, palms and pepper trees.

When, after wandering about a good deal and asking directions several times, we finally found the street that

Delia's house was on, and began to come to numbers that were near the right one, I noticed a bungalow on the corner, set in such a way, with a pittosporum hedge cutting it off from the house next door, and a vacant lot coming up behind it, that it got an unusual amount of seclusion. It was one of those lavish modern bungalows into which rich people put as much money as would build a mansion. Boyce and I stopped on the sidewalk to admire it. The next house, a big, concrete place, with its broad plate-glass windows all open, the curtains fluttering, was the one I was looking for. With a good deal of excitement I went up the front walk. Ranks of calla lilies bloomed at the porch edge. A woman was just finishing the scrubbing of the porch steps.

"Mr. Harvey Watkins lives here?" I questioned.

She paused in her work and surveyed me, a large, competent-looking person, with an expression that made you think of scoldings you had got when you were a child.

"Mr. and Mrs. Watkins are not at home," she said, and went on with her work.

"They're out of town?" I exclaimed, blankly, as one who has had a door shut in his face. "When are they expected back?"

"They're not coming home at the same time," the woman relaxed a little. "He'll be here first."

I sat down on one of the low, flat balustrades beside the steps, and looked at the woman's bent back.

"Well, when will Mr. Watkins get here?" I persisted.

"To-night. I'm cleaning up and airing the house for him now," not uncivilly, but in a tone that showed me I was on trial—under inspection. I suspected that she disapproved of my asking for Harvey, only, so I said:

"I'm quite an old friend of Mrs. Watkins. I used to know her when she was Delia Rogers. I am Mrs. Baird. Will she be away long, do you know?"

"It's hard to tell. She goes and comes as she pleases.

Your little boy won't pick the flowers, will he?" for Boyce had strayed over to the hedge and was down on his knees there.

I shook my head, wearily, and just sat still, waiting for energy enough to get up and go back to town. She glanced at me once or twice, and finally suggested:

"San Vicente is not your home?"

"No." Then I added, half desperately, "But I'm going to make my home here. I'm going to get a position."

"Oh, a position. Are you alone?"

"Alone."

She sat back somewhat ponderously on her heels, and gazed over toward the hedge.

"Who will tend to the little boy for you?"

"I don't know—yet," I said. "I'm at the Poinsettia at present."

"The Poinsettia?" she repeated, and, taking another and somewhat different look at me, rose from her knees and sat down opposite, remarking, "My name is Eccles. I have charge of things when Mrs. Watkins is away. Isn't the Poinsettia satisfactory?"

"They don't allow children there. They—they—"

I hesitated a moment, but she wasn't an ordinary scrub-woman. The lonely need to talk to someone was upon me. Out tumbled the whole story of my difficulties.

She listened in silence.

"Still," she said, pulling down her sleeves and buttoning the wristbands, "you can't blame them. They've paid their money—and they have the money to pay. I don't feel that way about children; I like to have them around. But you can't blame them."

"Blame them!" I said, choking. "I don't—particularly. But what in the world am I to do?"

"I guess you'll have to get a place for the little boy to board away from you."

A cold feeling began to settle around my heart. Send

Boy from me—deprive myself of the one thing that had given me courage to climb out of the pit? I could never do it! I got slowly to my feet, looking over to him at the hedge.

“Well,” I said, “we may have to come to that, but not till I’ve tried my best to find some other way. We must be going now.” I wanted to escape.

“I see you came out the Chandler street line,” she rose weightily. “The Arbolado’s more direct; and it takes you right to the door of the Poinsettia. Should you like to go back by it?”

“Why, yes.” It didn’t seem to matter very much what direction I went in—I always brought up against something painful and wounding at the end of my going.

“Wait a minute, then, till I close the windows and put my scrubbing things away—I’m through here—and I’ll show you where to take the car. It’s just down past my little house.”

Boyce, squatting at the hedge, looked around, and, seeing me alone, came running across the grass whispering in a shout, or shouting in a whisper, as children do:

“Come see, Muvver!”

He seized my hand and dragged me along to a gap in the hedge. He approached it stealthily, Indian fashion, pointing me to look. I leaned forward, to please him. What I saw was the vine-embowered downstairs sleeping-porch of the adjoining bungalow, built so close to the hedge that I could almost have reached out and touched a man who lay reading on the nearest of its two narrow, canvas-covered beds. First I saw only the length of limb, the slippered feet, and the newspaper held by a well-kept hand with a broad, peculiar ring on the little finger.

Boyce, bursting with importance, nudged and pushed at me without speaking. In the warm silence I could hear the rustle of the man’s paper, the indefinite small movements of his body on the couch. Then all at once it rushed

over me where I had before seen that hand with its curious ring; it was reaching down to pass a coin to a boy—reaching down from the platform of that train that had left me last night at Meaghers!

I shook my head at bubbling, dancing Boy, caught hold of him, backed silently away—and straight into Mrs. Eccles, coming out the side door with a small, fat black spaniel. Boy instantly began to make friends with the dog. I looked guilty. It was a relief to have Boyce sing out:

“What’s the doggie’s name?”

“Fairy,” the woman was beginning to thaw a bit to Boyce. “Mrs. Watkins always leaves Fairy with me when she goes away, because railroads and hotels don’t like dogs.”

“He likes me,” shouted Boy, and he and Fairy trotted on ahead of us, Boy with a hand buried in the soft coat.

The woman looked back once or twice, significantly, toward the house next door. I saw she wanted to talk about it.

“Are you acquainted with the Pendletons, too?” she asked finally.

“No,” I answered nervously, “not—that is, I met him once at a railroad station, but——”

I broke off; I just left this splendid specimen of things you would rather not have said, unfinished. The silence that followed it was most uncomfortable.

“She’s away from home, too.” The woman’s pronoun evidently was meant for Mrs. Pendleton. “Gone to be with her mother in Los Angeles till after the baby comes.”

“She’s very pretty,” I said. “I saw her picture in the paper at the time of her marriage. It interested me because the Pendleton camp is up in the Oregon mountains above Siskiyou county, California, where I was living then; ranch people haven’t much to interest them.”

She glanced again at the beautiful bungalow.

"I suppose the land company thought they'd done a big thing when they got Alvah Pendleton, Jr., to buy and build out here. Well, he's got plenty of money—or his father has. But his doings are a disgrace to everybody that owns near him."

I didn't want to gossip about Delia's next-door neighbours, so I said nothing, but she went on, relishingly:

"Shame to the bird that fouls its own nest. Of course men will cut up when their wives are away; but they ought to keep it in its place, I say—not bring their women business right into their homes, like young Pendleton's doing."

Our car came along, and cut short her unpleasant gossip.

When Orma opened the door to my ring, there was nobody in the hall but the little long-faced, dried-up looking old lady, Miss Creevey, who came fluttering forward instantly—I got the impression that she had been waiting for us.

"Ith the child coming to dinner?" she hustled out the inquiry. I don't know why a lisp should seem ridiculous in an old person.

"Yes," said Boy before I could answer, "an' my bud'n, too—he's hungry. Want to see my bud'n? He's upstairs. I go get him and show him to you. I feeds him in 'e little box 'at's his tummy."

Miss Creevey looked scared. I saw she had meant to be severe with us, and hardly knew how to go about it.

"I wanted to tell you, Mithith—Mithith—"

"Baird," I supplied.

"Well, Mithith Baird, you ought not to bring that child into the dining-room. It ith not right. We—we won't thand it."

"She's not going to bring him to the dinner table." Orma, still holding the knob, pushed the door a little to make me come through so she could shut it. "I'll be taking

his dinner up to the room. You can go and tell Mrs. Thrasher that——”

The little thin old lady ruffled and tried to show a fierce frown to the maid-servant, to me, even to Boyce; but that was as far as it went. I hurried on to the stairs, and Orma followed me, muttering:

“She needn’t think she can run over me. I know who put her up to it. She’s old Thrasher’s little dog Schneider. Thrasher’s been chewing the rag all day. She’s laying for you. She’ll spring something on you at the dinner table—see if she don’t. That’s always their place for a row.”

My head ached—not to mention my heart, and my soul. I was very hungry.

“Well,” I said, “I am going to have my dinner, anyhow.”

Boy was in his night clothes, washed and ready, by the time Orma brought up his meal. He was so sleepy that he almost dropped off over it, and I finally laid him on the bed, with his bud’n clasped to the front of his pajamas.

All this made me late. When I got downstairs they were in the dining-room, seated at the long table. The front door stood open, a big, luxurious automobile was drawn up at the curb and a young lady was getting out of it.

“Gene,” someone called after her from the car, as she came up the step, “we’ll stop here for you at six, then, to-morrow. You must go. Everybody’ll be there.”

“At six to-morrow.” The young lady paused on the step and spoke, merely turning her head. She was no one I had seen as yet in the house, not at all pretty, but of a tall, exquisite, slenderly rounded figure; and never before in my life had I seen anyone so elegantly smart. Of course, my experience of fashion was limited, yet everybody sees the magazines and the models in the Sunday papers. I knew as soon as I looked at her that she must be like the people on Fifth avenue—in Paris. We went

into the dining-room almost side by side, though I drew back a little to let her pass me, and she acknowledged my courtesy with a nod and smile—the first friendly greeting I had had from any of Joe Ed's "grove of nuts." Mrs. Tipton sat at the head of her table with its old-fashioned cut glass and thin family silver, and, as I came in, rose a little in her place and said in her clear, high tones:

"Ladies—this is Mrs. Baird. Mrs. Baird—Mrs. Thrasher—Miss Creevey—Mr. Martin—Mrs. Martin—Mrs. Tutt—Miss Tutt——" and so around the line till she came to the young lady standing beside me, when it was, "Miss Chandler—Mrs. Baird."

I bowed to them all collectively. Mrs. Thrasher was directly across from me, a woman with a curiously hard-looking head and face, hair that I can only describe as scrappy, and an aggressive jaw. It was almost grotesque to see how well her name suited her. On one side of her was Miss Creevey, on the other the Martins. Of this pair the husband was the little, old, invalid-looking, white-whiskered man I had noticed earlier; he seemed a perfectly suitable person to be included under Mrs. Tipton's term, "ladies."

A stoutish girl in a maid's dress, with a handsome, sullen face, pulled out my chair for me, and then turned to take Miss Chandler's motor coat and hood. She—the one person who attracted me—sat on my own side of the table, and, once in her chair, was out of my sight. I could see for a moment that all the attention ran to her, a woman at my left whispering to the one beyond her something about, "That was the Hoard automobile," but almost at once I got a peculiar understanding that comes to you on entering a room full of people who have been discussing you—saying unpleasant things about you.

Orma came in from the kitchen with my soup. As I took the first spoonful I caught a glance passing up and down the table. It was as though they had supposed I

wouldn't eat like a human being. I was hopping mad, and hurt clear through. But it was good soup, and I fairly starving. I took another spoonful. Then I ate, swiftly, resolutely. With that sense of growing hostility about me, with the women opposite openly neglecting their dinner—Orma had already changed most of the earlier comers' plates—bobbing their heads forward to exchange signals, I made haste to give myself the courage and support of some good hot food. Finally Mrs. Thrasher, elected speaker of the occasion by the silent vote of the eye, opened out as though she had stood on a rostrum:

"Mrs. Baird."

Orma took my soup plate at the moment. I leaned back; the blood rushed to my head, and its dull ache increased. Mrs. Thrasher stared straight across at me with bulging eyes. The clinking of silver on dishes was the only sound that broke an expectant silence. As I sat there waiting, I glanced away at the others. I don't suppose there really is a special sort of woman born and made to live in a fashionable boarding-house and raise rows about everything and nothing, but at the moment I thought so. There was not a face within my view that held anything for me. The powdered countenances, grey, barren, devitalised, the bosoms over which their silk frocks fitted, on which the bits of good lace were displayed—were there beating hearts in them? If there were, I got no indication of it. The little old Martin man scrabbled at his plate, and paid no attention. Down at the foot of the table chubby Mrs. Tutt—I'd had some hopes of her—nudged her tall, angular daughter.

"Mrs. Baird, we've all been quite excited about you to-day." The Thrasher woman fired her first shot.

The curious titter with which she ended most of her sentences had no amusement in it, nor any nervousness; it just seemed to be a physical habit. It was odd to hear

Miss Creevey echo the half-jeering little sound, as though she wanted to share it.

Orma set my dinner before me, and I controlled the nervousness that shook me, and took up my knife and fork before I questioned, as steadily as I could:

"Is that so? And why?"

"Itth the little boy," Miss Creevey put in. "I told her children were not allowed in the houth."

"Liar!" Orma breathed in my ear as she picked up my napkin from the floor and put it back in my lap.

Miss Creevey looked for approval toward her leader, but got a scowl.

I had realised all day that the heavy throbbing in my temples was a cry for rest and food. Appearances were against my getting either one. It seemed too miserable to have these women set on me at the table and spoil my meal, while Mrs. Tipton at the head of it passed things and directed Orma and affected to see nothing. Well, I might not be up to Mrs. Thrasher, but I wasn't afraid of Miss Creevey. My knife twittered against the plate edge. I hastily laid it down and said:

"You didn't tell me that children weren't allowed in the house. You told me they weren't permitted in the dining-room. I don't expect to bring my little boy to the table."

"Good for you!" Orma's whisper scared me more than it reassured. The whole thing seemed nightmarish; the beautifully set dinner table, the well-dressed diners, the ugly spirit almost visible, the servant hanging around behind the chairs like a boy at a dog-fight.

"But you were intending to keep him in the house?" Mrs. Thrasher's air was that of a clever lawyer catching a lying witness.

"I only expect to be here myself a few days," I began, but she broke in on me:

"Then you are not planning to make your home in San Vicente?"

"Yes. I'm going to live in San Vicente—that is, if I can find work here."

Work! I could see that I had dropped definitely below consideration in the opinion of every woman at the table when I mentioned work. Plainly they were all above that—of the idle class, if not of the rich. I suppose most of them had a bare little income—just enough to live on and despise women who work!

"I take it you are a widow then?" Mrs. Thrasher demanded, as one who had a perfect right to question.

"No."

"Ah! And when do you expect Mr.—er—Baird to join you?"

"I don't expect him at all."

Leaning forward to glance down the table in Mrs. Tipton's direction, I caught the eyes of Miss Eugenia Chandler, faintly amused, rather friendly; she glanced from me to the line of women across, then looked down at her plate and went on with her dinner.

"You don't—expect your husband—to join you?" Mrs. Thrasher ejaculated.

I was just baited enough to be bewildered and unwise—after all, Mrs. Thrasher was nothing to me. She couldn't eat me.

"I've left my husband," I told the whole tableful, hotly. "I'm going to get a divorce from him. That's what I came to San Vicente for."

"Oh!" A sigh, the most ridiculous sound I ever heard, like the gasp of a collapsing bicycle tire, went around the line. It was as though I had announced that I had come to San Vicente to pick pockets.

"Aren't we wandering from the point?" asked Miss Creevey. "I tried to tell Mithith Baird kindly that children are not allowed in thith houth. They are *not*. I thpoke to Mithith Tipton about it, too. I athked her if you had gone out to get other lodgingth, Mithith Baird."

Mithith Tipon thaid maybe you had. Ithn't that what you thaid, Mithith Tipton?"

The lady at the head of the table nodded, but Mrs. Thrasher gave her no time to reply.

"We have certainly *not* wandered from the point," she snorted. "I should say we had wandered *to* the point. Of course, Mrs. Baird will get other lodgings for her little boy if she expects to remain in this house. There are institutions that take care of the children of working mothers. The Poinsettia is not one of them. It is this later development that attracts my attention."

"Development—later development?" I echoed.

"Divorce. All the world knows the stand I have taken on this question. I haven't written any books——" she jabbed this in an ironical tone at Miss Creevey, who cringed as though she had been prodded with a stick—"but I have spoken publicly before a number of assemblies. I have a reputation to maintain, national, if not international, and I should like to know what cause——"

She paused, nailing me with those round eyes. I was as furious as a hungry, thwarted, tormented animal. Instead of saying "It's none of your business," I exploded:

"I'm leaving my husband and getting a divorce from him because I felt that our marriage was immoral."

In how many sleepless nights, watching the blue-lipped dawn in, had I agonised out that conclusion! It had become a commonplace to me—the raw, fundamental truth that sent me running away in the night. At its announcement a hush fell upon the dining-room. You would have thought I had blasphemed the Holy Ghost.

"Marriage—immoral!" murmured Mrs. Tutt, feebly. "Why, a marriage *can't* be immoral!"

"Er—er—ump!" little Mr. Martin began to creak unexpectedly. "Er—er—hasn't this lady got a right——"

But Miss Chandler's voice, mildly ironical, was raised

for the first time since she thanked the maid for taking her hat.

"Don't you think, good people, that these personal discussions are bad for the digestion?"

The speech produced something the same effect of her entrance into the dining-room. There was a straightening out of their faces; an attempt to smile and be civil.

"I don't want to talk about my affairs at the table," I said, abashed. "I'm sorry I allowed myself to do so."

"Oh, well, it can't matter—as you're leaving so soon," was Mrs. Thrasher's conclusion. "Ermentrude," she spoke to Miss Tutt, "did you overtake Mr. Dale this morning? What did he say? I do hope he promised to come."

"Well," Ermentrude was almost sprightly, "he didn't say he wouldn't come."

"He never does say he won't," lamented Mrs. Martin; "he just doesn't come."

After a moment of depressed silence, Miss Creevey asked with passionate concern whether Mrs. Tutt had found the double-threaded canvas at a certain shop, and then Mrs. Thrasher went into the discussion of some score cards that would be needed at an approaching festivity. The talk flowed toward what was evidently its usual channel; solemn, trifling arguments over the important question of twilled or plain, the relative merits of some recent novels, with a great deal of criticism on the new hat of a lady not present. I and my unfortunate affairs were let alone. I might eat now—if I could. I sat through the rest of the meal, silent, trying to steady my quivering nerves and control my stung sensibilities. This boarding-house was not all the world; to-night was not all of time. I never glanced up again. Without waiting for dessert, I murmured "Excuse me" in the direction of Mrs. Tipton and got away—upstairs to the room and Boy.

I stood by the bed and looked down at him. He had mounted the covers with that queer, plunging kick of a



THERE WAS A HOARSE, STARTLED WHISPER, "JOE!"
I SAW A YOUNG WOMAN STANDING JUST INSIDE THE
WINDOW LOOKING WILDLY AT ME

sleeping child; one foot was outside and one in. He lay in a sort of galloping pose that brought out all the vigour of his body. What had those women downstairs there to be proud of, as I was proud of him? Besides the ache, my head had a sort of spongy feeling as though it were filled with cotton. One moment I saw the child as he really was; the next he shrank suddenly like a thing seen through a reversed opera glass. I covered him. He promptly kicked the cover off—asleep or awake, my baby man had no truck with doubt, hesitation or timidity. I undressed, set the sliding window well ajar for air, and lay down beside his rosy, courageous sleep, reaching up to turn off the electric light that hung just above the bed.

On the instant my troubles rushed over me again. I had been dead for sleep, yet with the stretching out on my bed, the darkness and quiet, all power to command it left me. It wasn't that I was wide awake. I seemed almost as sleepy as ever—yet I couldn't sleep. Things that had been only mental worries in the daytime, in the light, took actual form and came at me. I found that I was going to cry. I was afraid of myself. If I began, that I might wake Boy; I might rouse the house. I struggled to control the long, shuddering sobs that took me and shook me from head to foot. Disappointment, failure, humiliation—it had all begun back there—back there—I felt the thought coming, and tried desperately, vainly, to push it away—back there with the ending of things between Philip and me, there in the side yard of his father's house. For the moment I was that girl, suffering all she had suffered, with the woman's added keen perception of what it was going to mean. I tried to get up, and fell back on my pillow, muffling my head in the bed-clothes, terribly frightened lest I should scream as I had that time when I had to tell my mother.

Life disciplines us. I didn't scream. The crisis passed, bringing almost unconsciousness at the moment, leaving

me weak, shivering, spent, the tears slipping down my miserable cheeks—but I had made no disturbance. I lay there, longing intensely for the boon of sleep, but it was denied me. The clock on the landing of the stairway checked off the hours and the half hours. There was no wind and the house was very still. I heard it strike two, and then I must have dozed, for it seemed almost instantly that I was listening to it again. One—two—three! I counted the strokes, bewildered, not at first recognising what sounds they were. There in the dark I slowly adjusted matters. I reached out and touched Boy, gradually recollecting where I was. The smell of the room helped me in that. It told my senses that I was not in my home; it addressed something that answers very quickly, and brought up the whole matter of this place, its owner, and the way I came to be occupying it. Across from me there was a long, narrow strip of dim illumination—the window. At the foot of my bed the door would be. On the instant there came a cautious sound from that direction. I knew then that the clock had not wakened me—it was this little noise. A cold prickling ran over me as the knob of the door was turned cautiously, tried, gently rattled—and then silence.

My heart plunged so that it almost choked me; I opened my lips to breathe more noiselessly. After all, it was another person's room—mightn't someone be just making a mistake? But it was no use. My heart was still pounding up in my throat, and a cold wetness beginning to gather on my forehead, when a new sound, over by the window, went through me like an electric shock. With a shaking hand I fumbled for the light switch above my head. Somebody was pulling at the sliding casement, which I had left ajar!

I strained my eyes and made out what seemed to me to be an arm across the lower part of the glass. Yes, there was someone kneeling there on the kitchen roof and try-

ing to slide the sash. It gave suddenly with a rasp, and the figure stood up. I got the silhouette against such light as there was—a woman in her nightgown.

I couldn't make a sound. The intruder had climbed through the window before my hand found the switch and I snapped on the light.

As the room sprang suddenly into sight, there was a hoarse, loud, startled whisper, "Joe!" I saw a heavy young woman in a nightgown whose top was coarse lace standing just inside the window looking wildly at me, at my clothes on the chair, my sleeping child.

For a moment she halted so, her mouth open, her eyes scared; then she groped back with her hand toward the window sill, found it, whirled her bare feet up and over it, and I heard them come down on the flat tin roof outside. I switched off the light. In the instant of its illumination I had recognised the maid, Addie.

CHAPTER V

HARVEY WATKINS

IT seems strange that after such a visitation as that I went sound asleep, and never knew anything till I was awakened, late next morning, by a thumping noise. There was Boyce, in pajamas, sitting on the floor leading his faithful bud'n around him in circles. I leaped up and ran across before I fairly knew where I was, calling softly:

"Boy—you mustn't hammer like that!"

"My bud'n taking a walk," he explained. I only got him diverted by talk of breakfast.

I hurried with my dressing, then began to hustle Boy into his clothes—to go somewhere, to do something, I didn't know where or what. He flinched from my chilly fingers.

"Stand over here, dear." I lifted him into the strip of sunshine that began to come through the half-obscured window.

Dressing Boy always heartened me up. It's the luxury of motherhood to revel in the beauty of a child, as a little girl with her doll—and Boy was such a gorgeous doll!

"Leave bud'n here, an' bring him some breakfast," he offered generously, as I gave his curls a final tossing up, and I realised that he had been watching my face for some time, "being good" while I dressed him.

In the hall outside we came on Orma. She glanced up and down; then said, significantly:

"Have any visitors last night?"

I hesitated and floundered for the right reply. She began to laugh silently, whispering:

"Ssshhh! Needn't say a word. I know all about it.

Served Miss Ad right—if you ask me. What'd I done that she wouldn't speak to me all day? If she hadn't been in one of her grand sulks and treated me so mean, I'd have warned her that he didn't come home—that there was somebody else in the room. Huh! Let her find out by her own smartness!"

I was still trying to think what I ought to say when she came close up and asked:

"Are you going to complain to the Mrs.?"

"Oh, certainly not," I cried, then added hastily, "I don't know what you're talking about."

She laughed out, flapped her hand at me, and scuttled toward the back stairs. Boy and I went down the front ones, to find the big hall empty, everybody at breakfast in the dining-room.

We had our meal at a down-town bakery; I ate slowly; I took my coffee in tiny sips, wincing from the plunge before me. Last night's experience had weakened my nerve—I wasn't so ready for a few thousand strangers as I had been. Delia Rogers out of town, there was not a soul in the place that I knew, yet something must be done to-day. When I opened my purse to pay for our lunch, the first thing I pulled out was the card on which I had written the number of Harvey Watkins's telephone and his business address. He would be back in San Vicente to-day. I didn't like going to his office, yet he might be able to suggest something helpful, quite as well as Delia. It couldn't do any great harm to just speak to him and see. This was Market street; I remembered the sign on the electric-light post at the corner. I looked up and down a bit, then saw the name "Cronin Building" on the big, white, glazed-brick structure on the opposite corner. I hurried across the street and was in the tiled hall, waiting for the elevator to take me to the sixth floor, before there was time to doubt or repent.

Word had come back to us that Harvey was prosperous,

and I always understood that, while Delia Rogers herself had no money, her family was wealthy and influential, but the suite of offices occupied by McBride, McBride & Watkins, with people at work in the outer room, from which doors marked "Private" opened off, was much finer than I had expected. The walls were covered with a heavily embossed imitation-leather paper. Huge bookcases, spaced at regular intervals, reached up to the frieze and held row after row of large leather-bound volumes. An oil painting hung above the clinker-brick fireplace. The heavy brown art hanging curtains were of a kind I had seen described in women's journals. The stiff chairs about the room, of Mission oak, matched the tables, at one of which, near the door, a tired-looking, middle-aged man in seedy clothes clacked away at a typewriter. When he paused and looked at me, I asked if I could see Mr. Watkins. He seemed doubtful. Mr. Watkins had just returned to town; was my business anything that could wait? Would I call to-morrow when Mr. Watkins wasn't so much occupied?

It was disconcerting, and it shifted my ideas bewilderingly. Back home in Stanleyton, a light-hearted girl in love with her Philip, I had known that you had to be careful or you'd get a little more than you wanted of Harvey Watkins; I had never thought of his values. Now I persisted:

"I want to see him this morning, if possible."

"We-ell," the seedy-looking old man hesitated, "I can ask."

I scribbled my name, the word "Stanleyton" and the date six years ago on the blank card he offered; he took it and returned promptly with a much enlivened air, saying:

"You can go right in. Hadn't you better leave the little boy with me?"

"Thank you." I hesitated, but Boyce seemed willing

enough, so I made my way alone to the door with Harvey's name on it.

The man who rose and stood beside the desk in that inner room to receive me might well have been a stranger. Harvey Watkins, in the six years since I had last seen him, had made the step from young man to middle-aged man—and there was nothing in him now for me to remember. His straight, stiff black hair, sprinkled with grey, lay close to a hard head; the lines of face and figure had set into the lawyer mould, and the excellent suit that any business man might have worn seemed lawyer-like to me, too. He looked prosperous—a man to be put forward in the affairs of his town; but he held up my little slip of paper, and when he glanced from it to me I got just a gleam of the old Harvey Watkins.

"So this is California Ann," he said, shaking hands. "Well—it is six years since we saw each other in Stanleyton, isn't it?"

The boys and girls in school used to tease me with that "California Ann." Here, among strangers, it seemed to me that I could have hugged a hitching post if it had been from the old village and had addressed me that way.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've got back to town," I cried, impulsively, holding to his hand till I got the familiar squeeze that reminded me again of Harvey Watkins who was a little too old for our set, about whom we schoolgirls used to exchange whispered confidences.

"Same here," returned Harvey, sprucing up—I can use no other phrase—and beginning to take stock of me. "I'm just back from the South. I went to take Delia to the Jefferson Sanitarium at Santa Anita."

"Oh, that's too bad!" I murmured. "Is—is it anything serious?"

"No." Harvey spoke with dry finality. "There's nothing particular the matter with Dele. But the Lord only knows when she'll be back—if ever. She enjoys lazing

around in those places. They wait on her and fuss her up, and 'my dear' her. It's a change from card parties and clubs. Are you in town for long, Calla?"

"I've come to stay," I put forward with what courage I could.

"That so?" Harvey's side glance at the piled work on his desk was natural enough; if I were coming to San Vicente to live, there seemed no reason that I should take up his whole morning telling him of it.

"Yes. I'm looking for work," I blurted. "I went out to your house yesterday—I thought Delia might tell me something I could earn a living at."

"What's the matter with Baird?"

"I'm leaving Oliver."

The words came with difficulty. It was the first time I had said them to anyone who knew me well, who might question or oppose.

"You're leaving——" His tone was startled. "Take a seat, Calla." He pushed a chair toward me and sat down facing it. I stood a moment drawn up, one hand on its back.

"Don't ask me anything, please, Harvey," I began. "There's no hope of my changing my mind."

"That's what they all say—at first," he commented.

"This isn't at first," I took him up quickly. "It's at long, long last. I've been nearly four years coming to it—and I'll never go back."

"Nearly four years?" Harvey repeated. "Then the match was no good from the start—eh?"

I shook my head.

"Hasn't he supported you?"

"Yes, yes—that's not it."

"Thought you said you were looking for work?"

"I am—I've got just nine dollars and fifteen cents in the world—borrowed money at that. I got it of the grocer we sold cream to—borrowed it to run away on."

"Well," Harvey half smiled, "I guess you can borrow some more from me to stay away on."

My face flamed, and I cried out:

"Oh, I didn't come here for that."

"No? Then what can I do for you? You see, with Dele away from home—— Are you fixed for a place to stay?"

"Why, I'm at the Poinsettia——"

"The Poinsettia!" Harvey laughed so widely that the gold gleamed from his teeth. "By George! You're the same little scatter-brained California Ann—the same girl, if your hair is done up different! It took her to come into a town with less than ten dollars in her pocket—and go to the Poinsettia!"

"Wait," I said. "You don't know how it is. I'm not a regular boarder there. It's just a temporary arrangement. A young man—on the train from Meaghers—lets me have his room there—for nothing—while he's away in Santa Cruz for his vacation. I don't know what I should have done if he hadn't offered it to me."

I spoke rapidly. Harvey watched me with the puzzled gaze of these dense people whose minds cannot follow quick speech. I felt that I had lost him about halfway through my statement.

"Go back to the beginning and say that all over," he demanded. "Who's this man you left Meaghers with? One of the Stanleyton fellows? Not Phil—is it?"

"Oh, Harvey!" I protested, almost in tears. "What an idea!"

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Calla. But when a woman runs away from her husband, it's usually another man. I didn't mean any harm. By George, you'd be a lucky girl if it was Phil. Old L. C.'s been getting richer and richer; everything he touches turns to money. Our firm's just bought a California property for him that'll net a hundred and fifty thousand income in a good

year. Seems a sort of pity you couldn't have hung on to that—don't it?"

He glanced at my face, and pulled himself up short.

"Oh, all right—all right, Calla! Now, what about this other fellow?"

"He was just the brakeman on the train," I said, wincing. "He was very good to me and said I could have the room till——"

"Where is he now?"

"He went on with the train—to his vacation—in Santa Cruz, as I told you. He won't be back for two weeks."

"Oh—he's coming back, then?"

"Why, his mother keeps the house! Mrs. Tipton—he sent me to her."

"His mother. Um, I see. So you're settled for two weeks?"

"No, I'm not settled at all. They don't allow children at the Poinsettia."

"Children!" Harvey echoed the word. "You haven't any——"

I had noted, right through the stress of our later talk, a soft fumbling and bumping at the door. Now it swung in; Boy stood a moment on the threshold, his feet planted wide, his eyes surveying the room; then marched to the centre of the floor and announced:

"I'm John Boyce Baird. I'm come to live in San Vicente now. I used to live on a ranch."

Harvey stared, mouth open. That wooden face of his began to change. It was a new voice in which he said, never taking his gaze from the child:

"Is this your boy, Calla? How time does fly! And you've named him for your father. Come here and shake hands, young man."

"Now you see why I've got to hunt work and lodgings both to-day," I said. "I don't suppose you could put me in the way of any kind of work?"

"I should think the mother of a son like this would have her hands full." Harvey took my man-child by the shoulders, gloating over him. John Boyce Baird looked up in his face and opened a friendly conversation:

"Are you got any little boys?"

Harvey lifted him to his knee. Across the turbulent bronze curls he shook his head significantly.

"Delia won't stand for it," he said. "She can talk your arm off about reasons why, but when it comes down to brass tacks, Dele is just a plain shirk. Good Lord—think of having a boy like this!"

"I do think of it," I cried. "I think of it all day and all night—and put it in my prayers. It's what gave me strength and courage to run away."

A slow grin spread over Harvey's unimaginative, lawyer countenance.

"I guess California Ann ran away on her own strength and courage. This young man didn't borrow the money for you, did he?—or get you the room?"

Boyce's small chest puffed instantly. He felt himself criticised.

"Well, I'm going to work and earn money and take care of my muvver," he spoke up bravely.

"Of course you are," agreed Harvey. "It's something fierce the way we men have to work for the women, isn't it, J. B.?"

"Do you work?"

"I should say so."

"Where's your overalls?"

"Well," Harvey looked rather put to it, "I guess these pants are overalls for my kind of work."

"Huh," said Boy, and he pinched disparagingly at the tweed knee on which he sat. "They ain't the kind I wear."

"No?"

"Mine are 'Can't Bust 'Ems.'"

"That's the right sort," agreed Harvey. He swung Boyce down and stood him at arm's length on the floor, keeping a tallying hand against his shoulders and arms, hefting him, studying him, as he added, softly: "If I had you out at my house, we'd get into our 'Can't Bust 'Ems' and do some work—wouldn't we?"

"I don't know if I could go to your house." Boy scuffed one foot doubtfully against the other. "These shoes I've got on are 'Steel Clads.' When I get bigger I can wear 'Boy Scouts.' What does your little boy wear?"

"I haven't any little boy."

"Not any—at all?"

"No."

"Haven't you even got any little girl?"

"No—not any little girl, even."

"But you've got a wife, and you got a house to put childrens in?"

"Oh, yes—the house is there all right—a great big house—empty."

He appealed to me:

"Calla, J. B.'s the right stuff for a lawyer. Better let me make one of him. That's the most luminous cross-examination I was ever put through. I guess it gets the case of me vs. Dele before you in a nutshell."

"It seems as though everybody's having trouble with their marriage," I said, embarrassed.

The 'phone rang. Harvey answered it impatiently, and put somebody off till to-morrow.

"Marriage is trouble," he grumbled, as he hung up. "You may thank your stars you're getting out of it."

"And thank you for saying that—for not trying to stop me," I added.

"Huh, you've got nothing to thank me for, yet. But there's one thing I can do. I can get your divorce."

"It's good of you to offer," I said. "But the first thing I must do is to look for a job."

"That's right where you're mistaken." He leaned forward and shook his finger at me. "You little gump! Till that divorce is got, you have no legal status. Baird could come in and take this child from you any day."

"Could he?" I questioned, startled. "But, Harvey, he never loved the child."

I lowered my voice, yet Boy had heard. The round, pink chin was thrust forward.

"I don't like *him*," said Oliver's son. "He whips me hard."

"There you've got it." Harvey looked from one of us to the other. "Even if Baird didn't care for the boy—and I can't believe that—he'll use him as a weapon to enforce you."

I reached for the small hand that fumbled at my dress.

"He can take his son away, and exercise the parental right of castigation unmolested if you, without a divorce and a legal status, refuse to go back and live with him—and you say you never will go back."

I stood silent. Since I made the first plunge and got away I had worried very little over Oliver. I thought I knew about what could be expected of him. But wasn't I liable to be entirely mistaken? Mightn't an outsider—a lawyer—coming to the case afresh, form a much clearer estimate of it than I, who had been down under the torment of it for years?

"I don't know what to do," I whispered. "I haven't any money to get a divorce."

"I'll get it for you. I don't want a cent—nor a dollar of your money." Harvey was explicit. "And I'll get you full control of your son."

Relief and gratitude boiled up in me.

"Oh, Harvey!" I put both hands out. "How kind you are! If you can really do that——"

"Do it?" He had the hands in his. I realised I had been over-impulsive. "Of course I can do it. It doesn't

make any difference what kind of a case you've got, the right lawyer can always get your decree; and I'll go my length for you, Calla."

The desk 'phone rang again, loud and long. I caught up Boy's hat, and we started for the door. He halted me with a gesture, then spoke into the receiver.

"Well?" and, after listening a moment, "Tell you what—I'll call you up in half an hour. Will that do? All right." He turned to me. "Calla, I am confoundedly busy now, but I'd like to come around and have a good, old-fashioned talk this evening. That's all right, isn't it? Make it before J. B.'s bedtime, if you like."

"But I don't know where I'll be, Harvey," I said. "I've got to go now and get a boarding place where I can have Boy with me."

"Oh—I forgot that point. Say—Calla——" he got up and moved toward me, his face brightening—"why not let the kid come out and visit me for a while?"

"Why," I hesitated, "he isn't old enough to stay in that big, empty house by himself."

"Huh, I'm ain't scared," Boyce remarked, and Harvey argued:

"The house doesn't have to be empty. I'll get the cook in to start things up, if you'll let me have J. B."

It was rather pathetic—a borrowed child.

"I guess we can't, Harvey," I said. "He's never been separated from me over night in his life."

"Now, don't make a sissy of him. He's a sure-enough boy. I tell you, Calla, it's the very thing. Listen here while I fix it."

He strode back to the desk, seated himself, took up the 'phone and called a number.

"No, don't do that, Harvey," I objected. "I'll see to it myself. I'll make some arrangement. We must go now. Come on, Boy."

He shook a hand at me.

"Wait. I'm calling Mrs. Eccles at my house out at Las Reudas—the woman we leave the place with——"

"Yes, and your dog," I laughed. "We saw her yesterday. But this is different."

"Sit down—Calla." He had got his connection, and began to speak into the 'phone. I stood there and heard him trying to arrange for the woman at the other end of the line to keep his house for a while, and take care of a four-year-old boy there. "No?" he said, finally. "Can't do it? Well, then, would you board the boy at your own house—just for the present? It would be a great accommodation. Oh, certainly—that's not too much. I'll settle these points when I see you."

He hunched a protesting shoulder at me, putting his hand over the instrument and turning to say, "Be still a minute, Calla. I'm tending to this," and concluded his negotiations with: "All right, then. We'll be there some time late this evening and leave the boy with you."

"Oh, Harvey, why didn't you let me stop you?" I broke out the moment he hung up the 'phone. "I know you mean to be kind, but—I don't see how I can let Boy go."

"Calla, that's no way to talk. You're not letting him go."

Yet I wouldn't give up. He wrangled; the desk telephone shrilled again and again; the elderly clerk came to the door and was put off with an irritable, "Get out, Bates! Don't interrupt me now." And all the while Boy, stirred up to it by Harvey, was clamouring that he wanted to go live at the house where the doggie was.

I was bound to be beaten—why not?—arguing with a lawyer. But the more Harvey insisted, the more stubbornly I refused to make a positive promise till five o'clock, when he would be at liberty, and, as he said, ready to take the boy out with him.

I got away from that building as though it had been afire. "Hush, Boy!" I said, almost fiercely, when he be-

gan again about the doggie out at the man's house. It was seven hours till half past five o'clock—strange if I couldn't, in all that time, find among the thousands of people in this town something to do, some place to go, so that I could keep my son with me. I was young and strong; I was not without abilities; and I was keen to hurl the whole of me into the attempt.

I couldn't just go up to people on the street and ask for work, so I made a list of the employment agencies, and visited them one after the other. At most of them—I might have known it would be so at this time of year—the regular business was almost lost sight of in the signing up of hop pickers. It was work I knew well; they used to grow hops profitably up around Stanleyton; I had picked there once or twice, with other girls, when I was just a big child. Later, the farmers around Meaghers attempted the crop, not very successfully; Oliver himself was nursing along a small field. I knew the toil in the burning heat, with the heavy, drowsy odour of the hops in your nostrils. Even if Boy and I could have stood it, it was a temporary expedient, and would take me away from town, where my real chance lay. No—it wouldn't answer.

"It wouldn't suit me," I said to the woman in charge. "Have you nothing else, that would permit me to have the child with me?"

She shook her head.

"This is all," she said. "But at this you'll have steady employment in the open air, and at good pay, for six weeks—every member of the family."

"No," I repeated, and every member of my family walked out of the place hand in hand.

After all, why go into details concerning that miserable day? God, who is its author, may be favourable to motherhood, but it took me less than two hours to find out that a civilised community has but one niche for mother and child—the home, with a husband and father to fend

for them. Everywhere I applied I was made to feel that Boyce was a folly, if not a crime; the sort of luxury a rich woman may indulge in, but for poor me little less than a piece of impudence.

Yet I brought some bits of worth-while knowledge out of my losing fight. If you go into an employment agency and ask for "anything" to do, you will get nothing. Even without a child, I was fitted for no regular wage-earning position. With him, it must indeed be something special, something out of the common, which it takes time to find and fit into. And time was what I did not have. Working housekeeper meant a position in some labouring man's home to fill the place of the wife who had been her own servant. Even so, I found but one such open; and the woman at the employment agency, after looking me up and down, refused to consider me, objecting: "It's a hard place, with a mess of little children. But that ain't the worst. I sent one young woman there—a nice-looking girl—and she complained. I'll not send him another."

Though it was failure all along the line, there was one kind thing that cruel experience did for me; it shed light on what happened to spoiled, high-spirited, twenty-year-old Philip when his parents sent him unprepared to San Francisco to get a position that would support a wife. The keenest edge on my suffering then had been the belief that he had not really tried; that he had not cared enough to make a genuine effort. To-day, as attempt after attempt of mine seemed to bring me only humiliation added to defeat, my heart went out to my poor boy lover who had been through it all before me. The old bitterness was clean washed away.

Boy's soft little feet were punished by the city pavements; his short legs grew so tired. Before I got back to the Cronin Building at half past five o'clock, I had sat with him to rest on the bench of more than one employment agency, and even carried him at the last. For the

time at least I was done. I could see my way no further; I was glad and thankful that there was a safe place for him, where he would be welcomed and made much of.

Harvey didn't crow over me. He was only nervous for fear I should back out at the last minute. He kept hurrying me, as though he didn't want to give me time to change my mind.

"You know Boy's got no clothes except what I brought in my suit-case, Harvey," I sighed. "My trunk hasn't come yet."

"Anything the matter with my going and getting what he needs?" Harvey suggested. "I always did want to buy boys' clothes."

"Oh, no," I said, hastily, "you mustn't do that. He can wear what he has here—till the trunk comes."

"All right," he agreed, and we went down to his waiting car. Harvey got in and took the wheel, Boyce, mute with interest, beside him. He turned to me. "You go up to the Poinsettia and pack his things. J. B. and I'll drive around town a little and then pick you up at that drug store on the corner of Arbolado and Thirty-ninth." He leaned closer to add: "No need to set all the old hens cackling by taking the machine down in front of the house."

This was probably only good common sense, but somehow it grated on me. I stopped, undecided, on the running-board, fumbling in the child's pocket to make sure he had a handkerchief.

"Go along, Calla. J. B. won't miss you." Harvey's hand on the steering wheel twitched.

I looked helplessly at the two there in the auto. I was already an outsider. Harvey grinned at me with a full comprehension of his advantage. He might be dull about some things, but this he understood. I was sure that instinct told him what a hold on a child's fancy it gives one to buy clothes for it.

When I got to the Poinsettia I was surprised to find my trunk in the front hallway. Well, anyhow, Boy could have his own things now. The trunk had already made trouble; Mrs. Thrasher stood over it talking loud to a straight, well-dressed young fellow whose back was to me, but who turned at the sound of the door—and there was Joe Ed's lovable, quizzical, devil-may-care countenance. My heart jumped; he'd have to have his room—where should I stay to-night?

He came up to me quickly. I felt sorry and ashamed about last night—as though I had spied. I tried not to think, as I looked at Joe Ed, so attractive in his fresh grey suit, what had hurried him back ahead of time, or that there was plenty of explanation for the act of that poor, foolish, sulky servant girl.

"Here's the lady now," said Joe Ed, in that soft Virginia drawl of his, advancing with outstretched hand. "Howdy, Mrs. Baird," speaking exactly as though we had been alone and there were no row going on. "Where do you want your trunk?"

"It isn't a question of where she wants it," Mrs. Thrasher cut in. "But if she's got other lodgings and is leaving, she surely will not expect her trunk to be carried upstairs—and then down again. Every trunk that is carried up the stairs is just so much injury to the house. The last one that went up scraped that place by the banister——"

I paid no attention to her as I shook hands with Joe Ed, hesitating:

"I thought you were off on your vacation."

He grinned a little sheepishly and explained:

"I found I might just as well go back and get your trunk for you."

"Oh, you oughtn't to have done that," I said, gratefully. "Though I am glad to have it sooner. You'll want your

room now." I tried to speak easily, but my tone was anxious.

"Why, no." Joe Ed didn't look at me. "I'm going right back this evening—going on to Santa Cruz this time, sure enough. And say"—he lowered his voice—"stay here as long as it suits you. When I come back I'm going to bunk with a fellow down nearer the station—for a while."

I knew better than I had the day before how valuable his offering was—not merely a stopping place, but the guaranteed respectability of the Poinsettia behind me.

"I'll be glad to stay—for a while," I agreed.

"Stay!" echoed Mrs. Thrasher, listening shamelessly. "I thought we settled the matter of the little boy last night."

"It's settled; I've only come for his clothes," I told her; then spoke to Joe Ed, who stood by waiting to do anything I wanted of him.

"While I run up and get the key, would you mind pulling my trunk over to the side of the stairs so I can open it and get Boyce's things out?"

It had been nearly nine hours since I passed through the door of that room. I tumbled my own things out of the suit-case, tossed in the few of Boy's that were upstairs, and then turned for the last putting-to-rights look in my glass. I caught up my one white silk scarf, drew it over my small hat, knotting it at each ear and tying it under the chin. Then I went down to find Joe Ed undoing the trunk straps and snaps for me. He stood close a moment as I bent for the unlocking and looked sidewise at me.

"They tell me you had a merry, merry time here last night over the kid," he said in an undertone.

"Yes," fitting my key in and turning it.

"Well—you're going to stay a while, anyhow."

He seemed a little uneasy at lingering while I might wish to open up the trunk, yet he was plainly so anxious to be reassured that I said heartily:

"Oh, yes—I'm only too thankful to stay till I can find a suitable place where I can have Boy with me."

He looked relieved and strolled toward the front door, his hands in his pockets, whistling under his breath. Vaguely I noted something familiar about the little musical phrase he repeated over and over; and then forgot it in getting out Boy's clothes.

Mrs. Thrasher had not Joe Ed's delicacy. She came right up and watched me like a customs inspector.

"You, yourself, are going to stay a while, then?"

"Why, cert, Your Highness," Joe Ed spoke softly over his shoulder. "She couldn't get away from a house that had you in it. Don't I just pine for a sight of you when I'm out on my run? Ain't that what brought me back here right at the beginning of my vacation?"

An incredible, silly half-smile relaxed the line of Mrs. Thrasher's iron jaw.

"Get along with you," she said. "You came to bring another woman's trunk. You can't pull the wool over my eyes, Joe."

I didn't hurry myself; I got out everything I wanted, and packed the suit-case neatly. Mrs. Thrasher stayed by me through the operation, and Miss Creevey came to join her before it was done. At the front Joe Ed lounged in the vestibule, still whistling. When I came out he took the suit-case from my hand as though it had been what he was waiting for. Mrs. Thrasher, following, watched us leave the house together.

We passed an express wagon drawn up before that wonderful leafy tunnel at whose entrance I had seen the tenant of the back bungalow that morning. The driver was unloading a large box labeled "Books."

"Seen the Big Noise yet?" asked Joe Ed, evidently for the purpose of making conversation.

"Do you mean the man who lives in the bungalow?"

"Yes. Frank Hollis Dale. Look at it there on the box.

Mark it well. Funny as a crutch to see those dames back at the house run after him and get left—and him a-standing still all the time.”

“The name sounds familiar, but——”

“Don’t talk that way in San Vicente.” Joe Ed shook his head at me. “The town’s so proud of having the Real Thing in it that it believes everybody ought to know all about him. You remember his being in the magazines so long when they thought he was lost in Central America and sent a searching party after him. That’s where he got his health broken down; he’s come to California to recuperate—lectures at the college here—and every woman in town that thinks she thinks a thought is after him to come to her pink teas.”

We were getting pretty close to the corner; I began to feel a little awkward.

“There’s a reason,” I blundered, “why I don’t want you to come any further with me.”

“Just as you say, lady,” he agreed amiably. “But where do I take the suit-case then?”

“Just give it to me,” I said, and reached out for the suit-case. “I can carry it. It isn’t very far.”

He refused with a motion. Stepping nonchalantly along, he glanced sidelong at me and began whistling again under his breath the same phrase that had caught my attention back there at the Poinsettia. As our eyes met I recognised that it was from the thing they tried to make the State song, and carried the words, “I love you, California.”

“Nobody could help it,” he whispered, laughingly, when he saw by my startled glance that I had got the hint. “That little old white veil just puts the finishing touch. Makes you look like the Light of the Harem, sure enough.”

“Thank you,” I laughed back. “A woman needs a compliment now and then—even if it is only the approval of a small boy, it does her good.”

"You're welcome," nodding, unruffled. "I've got a lot more any time you have use for one in your business. By the way, where is your sure-enough small boy?"

There was no need to answer. At the moment Boyce, sitting in Harvey's auto, drawn up to the curb on the side street, caught sight of us through the plate-glass windows of the corner.

"Muvver! Muvver!" he called. "Did you bring my bud'n?"

There stood the car and Harvey with my son, evidently waiting for me discreetly—out of sight—by appointment. There was nothing for it but to go ahead then, and of course the two men must be introduced. I hastily reminded Joe Ed that this was the Mr. Watkins I had spoken of, and that Boy was going to stay out at Las Reudas for a while. Here it was that Joe Ed's breeding showed. Apparently he was not in the least surprised at our arrangements, though I instinctively knew that any car he drove would have come up to my door for me openly, though that door had been the front entrance of the infernal regions themselves. He put the suit-case into the tonneau, lifted his hat and took himself off like the young Virginia gentleman that he was.

"Who's that?" Harvey demanded as soon as his back was turned.

"The boy I told you of that I met on the train." I was getting into the front seat, taking Boy on my lap. "The son of Mrs. Tipton who keeps the Poinsettia."

"I thought you said he was going on to Santa Cruz."

"He was, but he came back to—to——"

"Well?"

"He came back to bring my trunk. It had just got there. I was awfully glad, for it gave me a chance to get all of Boyce's clothes together. I hope you didn't buy anything for him. He doesn't need it."

Harvey had started the car. We ran a block or two, then he turned to say, dryly:

"Never you mind what we bought, Calla. I want to get it clear in my mind about this young man."

"There's nothing to get clear," I said, irritably. "He was the brakeman on the train, and he's offered me his room—temporarily."

"For two weeks," supplied Harvey, and guided the car into a broad, tree-lined, quiet street.

"Well," I hesitated, "he says now that I can have it as long as I want to keep it——"

"Heh," said Harvey, and speeded up. "I'll keep J. B. for you as long as you want to stay there."

CHAPTER VI

AT THE ROADHOUSE

WHEN it came to parting with Boy I was ashamed of the scene I made. The youngster himself was all taken up with the ducks and the garden, swaggering about, Fairy at his heels, glorious in the belief that he owned her now, as well as the house and Mrs. Eccles.

She stood looking on while I knelt where I had snatched Boyce just by the door for a last good-bye, Harvey waiting halfway down the path with his back to me, the motor at the gate. Everything had been said. I saw she was used to children, and would be entirely competent with him. But the more suitable and reasonable the arrangement seemed, the worse it hurt me. I hugged the little soft, limber body to me in a way that I knew Boyce hated. He was unusually forbearing, though he kept wiping off my kisses and saying:

“Well, good-bye, then. Good-bye, Muvver.”

“I wouldn’t get him all worked up if I was you,” Mrs. Eccles remonstrated. “He won’t sleep.” And Harvey called:

“Come on, Calla. J. B.’s all right. He’s a man. He doesn’t care which woman darns his socks. Come on.”

I hated him for the speech, but it stung me into allowing one of Boy’s “good-byes” to stand as final. I tore myself away, jumped up and ran, pulling down my veil as I went, jostling against Harvey, passing him, blundering into the auto ahead.

I got into the front seat because I had ridden there on the way out. It never occurred to me—till Harvey was climbing past into the driver’s place—that I ought to have

offered to go back to town on the street car. I said so, and he answered promptly:

"Certainly not. I don't know how it is with you, but I've got to have some dinner."

"I couldn't eat," I mumbled.

"Well, come along and see me eat, then," and he started the machine.

In the car, with its lighted lamps, everything about seemed dark, as though night had suddenly come. Sliding along in that tunnel of brightness that went ahead of us, I wondered helplessly at myself that I had ever agreed to the arrangement which separated me from Boyce. Why, that was what all the effort and agony had been for—that I should take the child away from Oliver, who was unfit, and have a chance to be the right kind of mother to him. Only that, it had long seemed, could restore my self-respect. And here, at the first touch of difficulty—and partly to please Harvey, who knew nothing of the real me and her aims—I had given the child up. Temporarily? At the moment our separation seemed eternal.

"Crying?" Harvey turned and tried to peer through my veil; then, as he got the little catching of an indrawn breath, he added softly, "Dear."

"No." I paid no attention to the familiarity. He might have called me "dear" or damned me then—I was indifferent.

"I'll bet you are."

"I'm not."

"Why don't you put up your veil, then?"

I laid the veil back, saying, as best I could:

"I oughtn't to have left the child. I know it now."

"It was the only sensible thing to do," Harvey declared. "When you've had a good dinner you'll see it that way, too."

"Dinner—oh, just take me home, and then go and get your own," I said, nervelessly.

"It'll be pretty late by the time we get back to town," he objected.

"I'm sorry. What do you want to do?"

"Why—er—there's a place on the way where we could get a mighty good dinner—the best crab Louis you ever ate." He hesitated oddly. "Would you mind going there?"

"Why should I?"

"Well, it's a—of course it's perfectly respectable—but it's a roadhouse. Still, nobody'll know us. We can have a private room."

"I suppose I'd better. I'll need a cup of tea and some little thing."

It was a very quiet place, secluded, almost sly looking, behind its latticed front fence with a tall gate. We had the private room that Harvey had suggested, and he ordered lavishly.

"Never mind about the toast and tea," he said. "Wait till you see what the boy brings."

When the dinner came I realised my hunger, and ate with appetite. As always, the good hot food began to put heart into me. I found courage to look forward; I remembered the one helpful suggestion made me that morning. The woman at the Y. W. C. A. employment agency had asked why I didn't take a few months at a business college, and fit myself for an office position. I turned this over in my mind now, watching Harvey, glad to see him enjoying his dinner; glad enough that he'd had his own way about that visit from Boy—it was mean of me to grudge him the child. It seemed we had travelled some distance on the friendly road since morning, when I had seen in him only a stranger with the name of the man I once knew. I marked little characteristics remaining which had been familiar to me in Stanleyton, and, whether I had then liked them or not, they now appealed to me simply because they were of old standing.

There's something queer in the effect of long association. It isn't a question of affection, or even of the most ordinary liking. It's just familiarity. We simply do not see the faults or failings we have so many times overlooked. I had never cared for Harvey Watkins, yet now Harvey, helping my plate, watchful to keep me supplied with everything, dealing competently with the waiter, finally piling a little heap of coins on the cloth beside the dinner check, evidently ready for his settlement, was a known quantity and a fairly agreeable companion. After all, this was Harvey—not just anybody I had chanced to meet coming to the new town. When he got as far as his coffee—my dinner had been done some time—I laid the Y. W. C. A. woman's suggestion before him.

"Sounds good to me," he said. "The Phipps business college is on the top floor of the Cronin Building. Suppose you go there to-morrow morning and talk to Pop Phipps about it. I'd stand for your expenses."

Without looking, he fingered a coin away from that little pile on the cloth and pushed it forward till it lay directly between us—a five-dollar gold piece.

"I took typing and stenography a few months in my last high school year," I said hurriedly. "And they have night classes there at the Y. W. C. A. Don't you think I could brush up sufficiently that way?"

"Too slow. You'd break yourself down at it."

"Well," I felt my face reddening; I was acutely conscious of that gold piece on the table, "she did say that some of them borrowed the money for a business course, and paid after they got a position. I shouldn't dare do that unless I was sure of a place beforehand."

"That's what I'm figuring on," said Harvey, cutting cheese in little strips and laying it with a water cracker. "We've been chewing the rag for six months there in the office about a private secretary for me—somebody not concerned with any other member of the firm."

"You're really going to have one?" I demanded. "Can you hold the position for me till I'm ready?"

"The position's yours—nobody else's," Harvey nodded. "As it stands now, Bates hammers out the briefs and the correspondence on that darned old threshing machine they call a typewriter, and they're a disgrace to the firm. But the main point is that any lawyer handling the sort of work I do—the McBrides have shoved all their dirty jobs off on me from the first—has got to have a private secretary that he can trust. That's what's needed more than stenography. You can get enough shorthand inside of three months. Better put that out of sight—the waiter's coming. He might take it for his tip."

"I'll pay just as soon as I can," I said, huskily, covering the coin.

"Needn't hurry yourself." Harvey grinned a little. "There's no interest charged on that sort of debt. Pay when you get ready—or never pay. Maybe I'll see a way to square it for you in some item of the office expenses."

The waiter came and went. I sat pushing the coin about under an uncertain palm. It seemed to me I couldn't pick it up.

"Maybe I could get a place to work for my board," I said, finally.

"You'll get on faster at the college if you give your time and energy to it. The tuition and expenses together won't amount to much. I'd advance the expense money personally, you see."

The coin under my hand got some reasonable colour with this, and I picked it up, held it a moment, turning it over, then dropped it into my pocket.

"Oh," I said, "I'm sure I could live on three or four dollars a week."

Harvey shook his head.

"You'll need about ten."

"Not so much——" I was beginning when he interrupted me:

"Well, split the difference," and added in another tone: "That white scarf thing's very becoming." I glanced over to find him looking steadily at me. As our eyes met he smiled. "But I like to see your hair—I always remember you with a lot of curls hanging down your back—the prettiest little schoolgirl that ever kept all the boys guessing."

"I might have taken my hat off for dinner," I said. "It's too late now. What time is it? Oughtn't I to be getting back to the Poinsettia?"

Harvey looked at his watch, and snapped it shut without telling me the hour.

"That's all right," he said. "But while we're here alone and have the chance, I want to talk to you about your divorce case. It'll take three months to acquire residence in the county. Meantime we don't want to slip up on anything. I've got to have the facts, so I can be ready to meet any movement of Baird's."

I sat silent, rolling some crumbs on the cloth. I suppose I looked uncomfortable. There was a flicker of curiosity in his eyes. Speech, at the moment, was beyond me.

"Don't be squeamish," he encouraged. "You know, Calla, as a matter of fact, the real grounds are not generally the ones on which the decree is obtained. A lawyer shields his client—but he's got to have the facts."

He paused expectantly. I had a queer feeling, as though my circulation were shifting the blood all away from my head and to my pounding heart. Then, in another instant, it all went there, making my cheeks burn and the big arteries in my neck throb.

"You needn't mind me," Harvey gave me another lift.

"What do you want to know?" I breathed.

He leaned forward. His eyes looked into mine in such a way that I felt suddenly exposed, shamed.

"Say, Calla, have you the ground for divorce?" he asked, "or has Baird?"

"I—why, I don't know what you mean," I halted out.

"Take it easy," Harvey said. "You'd be astonished at the things a lawyer is told—by people of the highest respectability, too. Suppose Baird has got the grounds? We'll find a way to put the screws on him. I'll get a divorce for you—whatever the circumstances are. But I've got to know—I've got to know the ground facts—the truth."

At a loss, I made no answer, and he added:

"There's nothing in the matter of—er—this fellow that's with you—young Tipton—that's going to handicap our action, is there?"

I stared at him angrily.

"Oliver never saw or heard tell of such a person."

"That's all to the good, of course, but if there's anything there to furnish Baird with a cross-bill, we want to——"

"For goodness' sake!" I burst out, my face flaming. "That boy! Why, he—he's like any child to me—like Boyce. Certainly there's nothing."

"Oh, all right. Glad of it. Then let's get back to our real starting place. Give me the ground facts—the case exactly as it stands—fully—explicitly—between you and Baird."

The ground facts—it seemed to me that I must descend into a pit of slime to get them and bring them up to him; but this once it must be done. I put my hand up across my eyes and began speaking. I stumbled along somehow with things I had never intended to tell another human being. Once launched, I made a clean breast of it, looking down beneath my sheltering hand, blurting out one statement after another, while Harvey let me alone—I suppose his lawyer's skill told him he would get more out of me that way.

"That's all," I gasped, finally, when I had come to an

abashed, humiliated completeness of revelation. "I'll never speak of it again to you or anybody else, if I never get a divorce."

Harvey hitched his chair forward, leaned across and reached for my hand.

"Don't worry," he said. "That's plenty to go on—and a lot more than I expected to have. I can see where Baird doesn't resist your suit. We can get money out of him, too, if you're willing to bring these complaints into court."

I fairly withered at the thought.

"Oh, no," I said, hastily. "I promised in my note that I'd never ask for a cent if he'd let me alone and let me have Boyce."

"Maybe that's better," Harvey agreed. "He hasn't got enough to be worth fighting for. Huh, after all, I envy you. You can have a divorce for the asking. You're not tied by the leg for life."

I settled hat and veil, and picked up my gloves nervously.

"Never mind those things." Harvey took the gloves from me and put them in his pocket. "You needn't try to shut me off that way."

"I wasn't," I said, "only I——"

"Well, you needn't." He wagged his head. "I'm going to talk some. Don't think you made the only marriage that looks pretty well on the outside and is a dead misfit as far as fundamentals are concerned. Hold on——" He saw I was trying to interrupt him. "I was a widower when I married Dele, was I? Supposed to know a few things? Well, I'd been a decent kid—I had no women experience. That first marriage of mine—miserable affair! The poor little girl didn't know any better than I did why she oughtn't to go through the form of marriage with a healthy young man. I didn't really know anything about sex. They're so darned decent that they don't teach young folks what would be of the most use

to them. Now I suppose I can spend the rest of my life paying Dele's sanitarium bills and looking at other men's children. That boy of yours—ought to have been yours and mine, if things had gone right."

I didn't know which way to look.

"Maybe—after a while—when her health's better," I began, shamefacedly, but he cut in on me:

"Oh, no. Dele's made sure of that. She was half sure when she married me. Now she's gone for a second operation. We fought over it about a week. But of course the doctor sided with her—said it was necessary. So that's settled."

I wanted to turn the conversation, but couldn't think of anything to say. Harvey was chewing away at something in his own mind. Now he began again:

"I suppose they all thought back there in Stanleyton that I made a fine match—good family, and so forth. Huh! When I came down here to San Vicente, Dele was the only girl I knew. She and her mother went after me strong, and they got me—that's all. It was you I always wanted. Calla, do you remember that time when we were making fudge at your house, and you and I were in the pantry pouring the stuff out into the platters, and I tried to kiss you?"

I laughed, between apprehension and nervous relief at this childish turn he'd taken, and reminded him:

"You came pretty near getting yourself lamed for life by having hot candy spilled on your foot."

"Sure," said Harvey. "You fought like a little tiger—and I didn't get my kiss." Then, suddenly: "I want it now. This time I'm going to have it."

I jumped up and ran, but the door I tried opened into an adjoining room—and was locked. Harvey was on his feet, and coming toward me.

"Behave yourself!" I cried, doubled, and flew around

the table. We stopped with it between us and stared at each other.

"Calla," whispered Harvey, "you can't put me off this time. Oh, you know how to look at a man and just drive him crazy."

"I don't," I protested, though I dared not glance away from him for a moment. "It isn't so. Harvey—for heaven's sake!"

"Don't raise your voice that way," he cautioned, uneasily. "I'm right here—the folks outside needn't be taken into our confidence. Come on—girl. Give me that kiss."

I had got my bearings now and located the door. It must be behind me. I whirled and had hold of the knob before Harvey could get around the table and stop me. As I turned it his hand closed over mine.

"You don't want to do that," he said, quietly. It seemed as if the mere prospect of my opening the door had cooled him. He was more like the man who had talked to me in his office that morning. Still I clung to the knob, leaning as far away from him as I could. After all, the scene was not so very different from that one back in my mother's pantry when we were pouring out the hot fudge and he had tried to steal a kiss.

Harvey began to argue reproachfully.

"See here; I don't understand you. Of course, you used to be a regular little touch-me-not. But now—why, I came mighty near having my kiss this morning when you grabbed me there in the office—only it wasn't the right place. Seems to me you blow hot and cold. I don't understand you."

"Stop talking that way!" I said. "There's nothing to understand. I'm not any different from what I was back in Stanleyton."

"Oh, yes, you are." Harvey drawled out the words,



I SHOVED AT HIM DESPERATELY WITH MY DOUBLED
FIST, AND WITH THE OTHER HAND REACHED BLINDLY
OUT AND TURNED THE KNOB

looking at me through narrowed eyes. "No woman goes through what you've been telling me and isn't—different."

"I knew you'd never respect me again," I said, low. "But you told me you had to know the ground facts. The ground facts! I ran away from that. I went to any length to get out of it. I think such a marriage is more immoral than what the world generally calls immorality."

"And there's where you're dead right." Harvey tried to draw me away from the door, but I kept my hold. "A man and woman could live together comfortably without marriage, and not half the harm—no harm at all, in fact."

"I wasn't discussing—anything of the sort."

"Well, I am. There's plenty of it going on, let me tell you. If people are only careful of appearances—— Take you and me, for instance; we could——"

"Harvey, hush!" I broke in. "What do you want to talk about such a thing for?"

"All right," he said, slowly. "Then I won't." His eye was on me. "Here are your gloves."

I let go the door knob and reached for them. He grabbed me. I ducked. Hat and veil came between his face and mine, were dragged down in the tussle, threatening to bring my hair about my eyes. I shoved at him desperately with my doubled fist, and with the other hand reached blindly out and turned the knob—the door was opening when Harvey caught it.

"Hold on," he whispered. "Let's get straightened up before we let the waiter see us."

I flung my head back, crouching away from him. He took a look at my face, and his own changed.

"For God's sake, don't look so scared, child." He waited with his hand on the knob. "Pull yourself together. I apologise." He still breathed short. "Nothing's happened. You're all right. I'm all right. We're the best friends in the world—and always going to be."

Without a word I crowded toward the door.

"Steady. Turn round—let me see if your hat's on straight. All right." He opened the door. "We must be getting home," he remarked, in a louder tone, apparently for the benefit of the sleepy waiter behind the desk in the office. "The folks will be wondering what's become of us."

Out at the car Harvey stopped me when I moved toward the tonneau.

"Won't you sit beside me?" he asked, penitently.

I made no answer, but got into the front seat. He cranked up, stepped in, and for some time we drove in silence. At last he began speaking.

"Now, see here, Calla, you don't want to be a foolish little Puritan and quarrel with a good friend because he chances to be a human man and not just a stuffed suit of clothes."

I hadn't the heart—nor the voice—to answer. He waited a minute, then said:

"I'm sorry. I'll promise never to offend you that way again—though if you ask me, I don't see why an old friend that's willing to go his length for you shouldn't have a kiss. Honest I don't, honey. It seems to me you're making something wrong out of a thing that has nothing wrong in it. Aren't you? Isn't that so?"

I sat hunched up, as far away from him as I could get, looked straight ahead of me, and made no answer. That gold piece was white-hot; it burned through and through my consciousness.

"Calla," there was alarm in his voice, "what is the matter? What makes you take it like this? I didn't mean any real harm—honest to God, I didn't. I'm just that way. You always knew it."

"I suppose I did." My voice was so husky that he had trouble to hear me. I tried again. "It made me slow about coming to you in the first place. And now you've fixed it so that I haven't got a friend in San Vicente."

"You know better than that. I'm a good friend."

I cleared the choke from my throat, and cried:

"You can't do anything for me now! I've got to go out and get Boy back to-morrow, and——"

My hand moved toward my pocket. Harvey caught the wrist, exclaiming:

"You've no right to do that! You're bound to consider the child's welfare."

"Well, we'd both better starve in the street than that his mother should——"

"Oh, Calla, Calla!" Harvey threw up his hand in protest. The car came to a sudden stop in the middle of the road. "There, I've killed my engine. What can I say? What do you want me to say? I'm sorry to death—I'm just as humble as I can be. Will it fix it if I promise never to give you the slightest offence again? Why, we're old friends, child. We've known each other all our lives. I used to think everything of your father."

I couldn't answer him. After a moment he started up the car. We rode on a while, then Harvey asked, quietly:

"How is it, Calla? Are you going to forgive me? You have to be helped. You can't make it alone. I want to be your friend—somebody's got to. I can do it—if you'll give me a chance. I can behave to suit you."

"Well," I sighed wearily.

"And it's all right between us? We're friends—if I promise to be good?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll push your divorce case; and you'll let me go ahead with the business arrangements for you? Don't say no. I'll turn it over to old man McBride, if you want me to—you won't have to deal with me at all, if you'd rather not."

"Oh, you needn't do that," I allowed. "Harvey, this has been a hard day. I—I'm worn out. It's all right—but just let me go home and rest."

"I will," he said. "Poor girl, it's a shame to give you

any more walking to do, but—it will be best for me to drop you out at the corner by the drug store again—won't it? I only want to use care—for your sake."

I just nodded. A minute later we drew up at the furtive corner, and I got out in silence. He would have driven on instantly, but I stopped him to say:

"You'll see Boy in the morning?"

"Oh, certainly."

"If there's anything he needs—maybe I'd better call at the office and see."

He caught at it eagerly.

"That's right. You'll be starting in at the business college, anyhow. Come to the office on your way up. I'll have the good word for you from J. B. Bye-bye."

He turned the car and drove quietly away.

Dead tired, I slept that night like an overdriven animal, my empty arms thrown out across the place where Boyce's little body should have lain.

CHAPTER VII

THE TURNING OF THE WHEELS

I AWOKE next morning with my soul all black and blue; but I blamed myself more than Harvey for the bruises. What a way to behave—protesting, and pulling away, girl fashion! Of course it would only make him worse. And in the end that gush of his about “being good”—“never offending again”—was no practical basis for a business relation. He was offering me much; he meant to be kind. The only way was to have things out with him calmly and definitely. All through my dressing, my breakfast, and going down to the Cronin Building, to the very minute I walked into McBride, McBride & Watkins’s office, I was nerving myself for the interview—only to be told that Mr. Watkins hadn’t come down yet.

“But he ’phoned me to hand you our scholarship card,” said Bates, the clerk, when he saw how blank I looked, and reaching it from a pigeon-hole, shoved it into my fingers, along with an envelope that had my name typewritten on it and the memorandum, “Expense money; \$2.50, in addition to \$5.00 in hand paid.” Harvey had made an open business transaction of the matter. I was still a little bewildered, but I couldn’t see why this wasn’t better than my idea of having a talk. Apparently he’d put matters now on a basis that would answer. Bates was explaining like a cash register.

“You’re to get this weekly, or any way you prefer, at my desk.”

I nodded.

“If I might offer a suggestion, Mrs. Baird,” Bates’s imitation-lawyer tones were modelled a little on Harvey’s, but more on the older and more imposing McBride

brother's, "I'd advise you to read law at night—just a handbook or so. They're right here in the office library. You'll find it a big help in holding a position of this kind."

"Thank you, it seems a good idea," I said, passed out, got into the elevator, and went up.

The Phipps Business College occupied the entire top floor of the Cronin Building, divided off by cheap, half-high partitions, except the one to the typing room. When the door of this opened a moment for "Pop Phipps" to come out and speak to me, a perfect blast of factory-like clatter came out with him. He received me in a little glassed-in office. Down at the other end I could see some rooms were used for housekeeping. A red-haired girl in a bungalow apron was plainly visible through the open door, washing dishes. Mrs. Phipps came out of the same place and joined us in the office.

My card turned out to be a free scholarship, placed with the McBride firm when the college was getting started, supposed to cover any legal business that might become necessary, but really given for the purpose of advertising the school. The Phippses openly lost enthusiasm at sight of it. Yet they proceeded to the routine questions. My little bit of work in stenography and typing in high school so long ago amounted to nothing. As a beginner I would be in Mrs. Phipps's classes. While Pop—nobody ever called him anything else—went after the books I was to carry home with me, Mrs. Phipps took the opportunity to size me up. I didn't wait for more than one plain, blunt question to give her the practical points of my situation quite as plainly and bluntly, and I finished by saying that I still hoped to find a place where I could work enough to cover my board.

"Yes," she glanced back toward the half-open door and the girl in the bungalow apron, "we use student help, but Miss Scott has the place now—and there's always a waiting list among the students."

So I began at twenty-two, and with a child dependent upon me, to do the thing that ought to have been completed when I was seventeen and in high school. If I had ten daughters, they should all be given knowledge of some useful occupation by which they might earn an honest living at need. My mother had felt that her daughter was too pretty and attractive ever to have that need. She did not know that any beauty or charm a woman may have seems to turn against her and hinder her when she is pitched into the tide of unskilled workers.

Mrs. Tipton surprised me a little when I came to deal with her. There was something fine in the way she accepted me, never taking the attitude of the others in the house that I was a designing woman, an adventuress, a divorcee—worse, a would-be divorcee—dangerous to her boy; but fluting at me like a little brown partridge mother:

“If Eddie likes to let you have the room while he’s not using it, why should I charge you rent? It is certainly a poor place. I couldn’t offer it to a boarder. You’re welcome, Mrs. Baird.”

In my heart I forgave her for having called me “an oddity,” and I accepted the room for the two weeks that Joe Ed had at first offered me. Beyond that, we finally settled on a dollar and a half a week as proper rent. It was ridiculously cheap for anything in the Poinsettia, of course, and when I’d cleaned, swept, dusted, and got my books and a few other things I’d brought with me in place, it began to be home.

There was no guessing whether Joe Ed’s mother had any inkling of what had been thrust on my notice that first night in his room; but I knew, if she did not, that it would be a good thing for her son to be out of the house just then. In the cleaning and settling of my new quarters I came up against Addie several times, with her smouldering gaze and red, sulky mouth—a cheap personality, yet not lacking a touch of the dramatic. Poor thing, she

looked at me rather queerly that first day; but as time went by and nothing came of the incident she ceased to pay any special attention to me.

At five o'clock I couldn't stand it any longer, dropped everything and went out to see Boy. There he was in "Can't Bust 'Ems," all taken up with his own affairs over in a corner of the garden. He wasn't interested in me unless I would come and help dig, and I finally went away relieved. My last view was of his bright head bobbing there under the acacias; the sound of his voice followed me, singing like a giant bumble-bee, "Doomble, doomble, doomble, doomble, oomble, oomble oomble."

How I revelled in the sense of individual responsibility! I, none other, was to make it—or fail. Back at the ranch I was part of an enterprise in no sense mine; I had to work it in a way I should never have planned in the first place, or held to afterward, like a rower down in the bowels of a galley, who can't see where he is going or why he's trying to get there.

The week flew past in a hurry. I was so rushed—and so pleasantly rushed—that I hadn't a minute to think, much less to worry. Getting up early to study before I left the house; carrying a book along to the restaurant to prop it beside my coffee cup for a last desperate go at the lesson; sitting in a school desk, praised for a good recitation, reproved for a poor one—why, it was as though I had wakened at a stroke from a dream, a nightmare of a miserable marriage and a ruined life, to find myself a school-girl again!

The hopes, the ambitions, of that schoolgirl roused, hungry from that six years' sleep, it took all the anxieties I had, burdens of my poor wardrobe and the care of my room—things that mother used to help me with—to keep my feet on the ground. They wanted to dance these days.

Oh, I knew I was like a girl again when the admiring glances began to come my way from the classmates or

young fellows who waited in the lobby of an evening to walk home with some girl. If I didn't want such an escort myself, I had need to look a bit prim and unapproachable. Well—I didn't want one, of course, but it *was* a luxury and a reassurance to be able tacitly to refuse again! Let the most correct and Puritanic gainsay me if she can!

Curiously enough, the first memories of Philip Stanley that didn't hurt swam in upon this insurging tide of girlhood. Always, up to this time, thought of him had come knife in hand, stabbing at my self-respect; but now I had a glimpse of being able to cast back—almost happily—to the days when the high-handed young outlaw had made me his consort and confidante. It might have been only the association of ideas, but whatever it was, it sometimes carried me so far that it would scarcely have seemed strange to have him walk into the classroom of the Phipps Business College of a morning, making all those about me look less than themselves; and still mine, giving me the sense of being an emperor's chosen.

I had dreaded Sunday a little, on account of Harvey; it would be my one free day for Boyce—and his, too. But it seemed I need not have worried—he was out of town for the week-end. Boy and I took a picnic lunch and rode as far as a little spur line, the San Vicente, Las Reudas & Corinth, would take us. It wound up in a beautiful, still canyon of the foothills. We had a long, happy day of it there.

Then, back at the school work once more, I dug at it for all I was worth; it went fast; what I had done years before was not altogether wasted. It was early in that first month that Pop Phipps called me, the rawest beginner he had, into the office to talk to Frank Hollis Dale. I had seen the tenant of the back bungalow almost daily, as he went and came, always fluttering Mrs. Tipton's "bunch of dames" by his mere passing. It surprised me a little to find his Eastern elegance and finish here at the Phipps

school looking for the sort of student help that cost nothing. But when he began to speak I forgot this.

He wanted his weekly lecture at the college typed; Pop Phipps had picked me out on account of my Latin, and because he said I was the only one he "had on hand," among those who would work for the practice and without pay, with sufficient general intelligence to handle Mr. Dale's matter. Perfectly superior and unabashed, the great man explained that it would be mostly copying, asked me if I could read a bad hand and very blind manuscript, and suggested that he'd have to read the worst of it to me; but if Frank Hollis Dale only said "two of these," or "make them eight by twelve," or inquired, "Will it be ten cents or fifteen?" the power of a big, clear intellect seemed to raise the value of the insignificant words. Listening to him was like stepping into a large, quiet, well-proportioned room that contained—everything you wanted to know.

It was my first contact with greatness in the flesh; and for once the maxim failed—I was not disappointed. The arrangement was for me to do the typing on Mr. Dale's own machine at the bungalow, the work to begin that afternoon. I think I carried as wildly beating a heart as Miss Creevey would have had under similar circumstances when, about three o'clock, I made myself as neat as possible, went out the front door of the Poinsettia, took the leafy tunnel-way, and knocked at the entrance of the little green hill in the back yard.

Mr. Dale opened the door to me himself; I took a quick look around. The cottage had been rented furnished; there was nothing interesting except his books, which filled the built-in shelves and overflowed on tables, chairs and floor. One section of plate shelf by the door was crowded with copper and sculptured stone things that I was sure had come from the Central American explorations. But he called me straight across to the typewriter, without

giving me a moment to examine. He was behindhand with his work, and in haste to begin.

He found me slow and drove me like a fire, seeming to forget whether I was a human being or a clumsy, half-made tool. Impatiently he repeated his phrases till I got them down on the paper. His fingers twitched irritably as they pointed me through the labyrinth of manuscript. The lecture was on archæology; I knew nothing about the subject, and would have said I cared less. But even amid that breathless struggle to keep up I could see that he made it fascinating. I panted and perspired. It began to grow dark. I thought we weren't going to pay any attention to dinner time, for Mr. Dale snapped on the current in the goose-neck light that stood beside the typewriter table, and went ahead, till he suddenly realised that he was hungry. He was done with me that minute, though we had only about one-third of the lecture in type. I got up quickly to go; any decision that Mr. Dale had made so immediately came out into the atmosphere around him that he could almost make you obey without saying a word.

"What time will you want me to-morrow?" I asked.

"A little earlier, please."

I did want to stay for a minute and look around the room, though that goose-neck light, intended for nothing but to show you the spot you were working on, didn't give much chance to see anything, and Mr. Dale was excusing himself brusquely:

"To-morrow at half past two, then, we'll say. Pardon me—will you close up things here? I'm my own cook and bottle washer. I'll be lighting the gas stove for my dinner."

I went. In the days after that I was always looking for a chance to become a little better acquainted with the room and the man who dictated. The interest of both lay partly in their refusing themselves to me. It was a charm I couldn't get away from, and more purely of the intellect

than anything which had yet come my way. My only chance really to enjoy it was when Dr. Rush dropped in, as he did sometimes while we were at work. Mr. Dale wouldn't stop for any other human being, but the doctor might stay as long as he liked—which couldn't be very long, for he had a big practice and was always on the jump. The two had been classmates; it was through him that Mr. Dale had come to San Vicente. They were physician and patient, yet I realised that there was no question of money between them any more than there was between Mr. Dale and myself, but that the overworked big-brained physician, starved for mental companionship in this material, rich, money-getting little city, prized above money the contact with a first-rate mind.

A visit from the doctor always meant a bout. At it they would go, hammer and tongs never discussing anything less than world matters, always on opposite sides—the doctor with his warm, quick-grasping hands, his red-brown eyes and hair and skin, vital, human, radical; the other conservative, dispassionate, cold in his colouring as his view of life. To sit mute and listen to them was an intellectual awakening—an education. I was reminded of the ancient sage whose student fell asleep so that the illumination of the teaching went past him to fall on and glorify the intelligence of a little black demon squatting unnoticed on the ground. Most often it was Dr. Rush's words that enlightened me. Yes, and I sometimes got them again—almost verbatim—in Mr. Dale's dictation next day.

I secured a public library ticket. Crowded as I was with school work, and Mr. Dale's typing, I used to go and get out something that I'd heard him and the doctor wrangling over, and carry it home snuggled under my arm, with just the gloating, guilty feeling a secret drunkard has over his bottle. And oh, when I read them my dingy walls would melt away! I read *Jean Christophe* this way,

stealing time for it, taking it in great gulps, daring to have opinions about it. My shelf of old darlings looked down at me rather reproachfully—I was so crazy for the new stuff; I did want to know what people were thinking, feeling, writing about this minute. Shaw with his breath-taking iconoclasm was like strong waters to me. His dancing devil of wit could make a place of revel out of my little back room. Maeterlinck's *Mary Magdalen* I read this way, and Galsworthy's *Dark Flower*. Maurice Hewlett's *Open Country* was to me like coming out into a free, beautiful, idealistic world.

The people at the Poinsettia executed a quick right-about face as soon as I began to do typing for Mr. Dale. I was certainly no less a working woman than when my statement of the fact had put me down in their eyes at my first dinner; yet being on any sort of terms with the great man made me at once a person of consequence. They even had an air of forgetting by common consent the odious existence of Boyce, and one after another, as by chance, they waylaid me to make friends. I was willing enough—I never cared to quarrel. The insatiable curiosity they had on this one subject was what Joe Ed would have called “funny as a crutch.” Why did Mr. Dale do his own work?—as if I could—or would—tell them anything about him. They had the same chance that I had to know that he did his own washing even, so far as socks and knit underwear were concerned. They could see him hanging these things to dry in the seclusion of that back yard. They seemed to hope I would know—and tell—where his salary as lecturer at the University of San Vicente went. They all asked whether he had his wife's picture up anywhere. Did I notice whether letters seemed to be passing between them? What did he seem to like to eat? Did he black his own shoes? There wasn't one of them that wouldn't have been glad to come in with a bowl of food as the Himalayan villagers did for their holy man in Kip-

ling's story—not one who wouldn't have felt it an honour to restore the polish to those sacred boots!

About the most ridiculous of all these encounters was when Miss Creevey found me reading her book, that I'd picked up from the hall table through curiosity. She was so pleased—I felt such a hypocrite! She told me breathlessly, her lisp tumbling the words heels over head, that she had presented Mr. Dale with a copy, and that he said it was very unusual!

"He athked me if I wath ever going to write another," she said. "I hadn't thought of it before; but with hith encouragement I am conthidering the matter. I could get him to critithise the manuthript—and I would thertainly have you to type it."

So the poor old lisping thing caught step with the procession just as she had when I first came to the house and Mrs. Thrasher was on the warpath after me. Then, Miss Creevey got out her little hatchet and came along; now, she brought her book and put it in my hands, as full of pride as a young mother showing off her baby. "The History of Modoc County in Rhyme" was a deformed infant. My sympathy for its satisfied, uncomprehending author made us friends. When Mr. Dale handed the book to Dr. Rush a week later, with one of his biting, brilliant comments, I felt like defending it.

With Mrs. Thrasher herself the Battle of the Undesirable Boarder and Her Impossible Child had given place to the Siege of the Garbage Man. As owner of the premises she attended to the garbage; she said fiercely that he had been systematically overcharging her, and her row with him might have taken her mind off my affairs; but it was plain that the iron-jawed woman, no less than the others, yearned toward Frank Hollis Dale, and hoped to approach him, even through his typist. She transparently made occasion to speak to me one day, and gave her formal

sanction to my existence—yea, even to my dwelling in her house for a time.

So I thought, of course, when Miss Chandler, meeting me in the hall, asked me in for a cup of tea, that she, too, wanted to talk about the great man. I was none the less flattered by the invitation, for I knew nobody else in the house had ever received one. Eugenia Chandler, an orphan, about twenty-six years old, was by common consent the leading figure at the Poinsettia. She belonged to what was possibly the most distinguished family in San Vicente. Chandler street and Chandler square carried the name, and though it seemed there couldn't have been a great deal of money left her, she was certainly a very influential person for so young a woman, admired, envied, run after.

Her room, directly over the big downstairs hall, had a great bay or oriel window that jutted out above the front entrance. Its own passage cut it off from the main corridor, shutting it away behind two doors. It was like a little separate residence within the Poinsettia. There was a curtained alcove for bed and dresser, a private bath, and a wealth of closet room. The old mahogany, good Turkish rugs and concert grand piano in the corner were her own.

I was attracted by the tea table, with its embroidered linen, Belleek ware and heavy, handsome silver, till I caught sight of the books in her bookcase; then I flew to them. There were French and German volumes in the original, besides a lot of late books that looked like heavy reading. I knew by this time that she had been educated very finely at home, and studied music abroad under teachers to whom you must have an introduction, who will not keep you as a pupil unless you show a certain ability. I knew, too, that she went all over the state, at the invitation of women's clubs and musical organisations, to give her parlour piano talks. The boarders took pride in her,

her birth and station, her attainments, only a little less gushing than that they felt in Frank Hollis Dale's celebrity. I had once or twice heard her practising—brilliant, difficult stuff—as I passed in the hall. I don't care for that sort of thing, but as I went and sat down at the tea table, feeling rather subdued, it occurred to me that it would be polite to ask her to play for me before I left.

When I did so, she shrugged and laughed and said it would be "such a bore." I didn't know whether she meant to me or to herself. She answered my timid remarks about books in a word or two. I saw the subject did not interest her.

It wasn't that she had books about her which she hadn't read, or kept them there for show. Her attitude toward the world of print seemed to me that of a well-bred person who had had all of that sort of thing she wanted all her life, and saw nothing in it to talk about. I would have said that she read a book and put it up on the shelf—and that was the end of it. It just seemed to be there, lying without life in her mentality. My mental interests, freshly roused, keen and unsatisfied, found no response here. It seemed I might as well unpack my Frank Hollis Dale budget—of course that was what I was there for. I had just come from my work at the bungalow, this time not a college lecture, but a magazine article, a splendid thing, whose statements were set forth like a martial array, whose arguments came down so many marching columns. But instinctively I chose to tell Miss Chandler a little personal incident of the afternoon.

"Mr. Dale doesn't need distance to lend him enchantment," I said; "he always seems great to me. This afternoon when I went in, I found him down on his knees with a bucket of warm water and a soapy cloth wiping up the kitchen linoleum. He wouldn't let me finish the cleaning for him, either, but just went and sloshed out his bucket and cloths in the sink while I was getting my machine

ready, then came in and gave the most brilliant dictation I've ever had from him."

There was a little silence. Miss Chandler poured me more tea. I slowly realised that I had been mistaken; here was one woman not in the least concerned about Frank Hollis Dale.

"I imagine that sort of thing—scientific magazine stuff, even the best of it—doesn't pay very well," she observed, as she handed my cup. "He's not a popular writer, of course."

"Oh—I suppose not," I said, a little dashed. "I wasn't thinking of money. The play of such an intellect is something above and beyond money—like the flare of lightning in the sky."

Miss Chandler looked across at me curiously.

"How enthusiastic you are!" she shrugged. "You may not think about money, but Hollis Dale married into a set where he's got to."

"You know his wife?" I questioned.

"Some of my friends do. It was an ambitious social match, but he didn't get any money with her."

"Why, I thought it was her fortune that went into the South American expedition," I said, "and that was the reason why he was so determined to make good—saving every penny—doing work not fit for him, as he does."

"Does he save? Well, he'd better. She didn't have any money; just a rich girl's tastes and nothing to support them. Her relatives—Boston people—put up for that South American venture. And they'll put up again. Pride, you know—a scientist in the family—but they'll get him just as cheap as they can."

It was pride matching pride, then, I thought, recalling a lavish gift I had helped him pack to send home to his wife on their wedding anniversary, an exquisite necklace of carved Chinese jade, that never cost less than a hundred dollars—and he washing up his kitchen floor to save

the fee of a Jap houseworker; choosing rather to scold and fret over my bunglings than to pay even the nominal charge of a more advanced pupil.

When I described that jade necklace to Miss Chandler, I quite innocently stumbled upon the Great Subject, so far as she was concerned—dress; personal ornament. She began to get out her own jewelry to show me. Soon the top of her bureau was covered with rings and pins and chains of one kind and another, some old pieces, but mostly new. It was like a store. The conversational route from jewelry to clothes was short and easy, and never had I seen anyone with such oceans of them. The big closet with a window in it that opened off her room, a smaller one cut from the entry, even some extra hooks and shelves in her bathroom, were fairly stuffed with shoes, hats, wraps, dresses—of rich material and special design. She was all for what she denominated the *dernier cri*. Whatever was fashionable was to her desirable, so she kept buying new things all the time; and though she gave away a great deal to the servants, particularly Orma, who waited on her like a personal maid, she had there more clothes than four women could have used.

After that I was often asked into Miss Chandler's room. She had spells of pulling out everything she possessed to look over, when bed, couch, chairbacks, and even the floor, would be piled and draped and hung with clothes. She called me in one of these days as I was passing. There she sat on the carpet in the middle of things, that limber, graceful body of hers curled up in the loveliest attitude. She wanted me to look at a blouse she had in her hands, a combination of coffee-coloured Arabian lace over delicate tissue of a curious raisin shade.

"Try that thing on," she said, and tossed it up to me.

I slipped it over my shirtwaist, and went to the glass. What I saw there hurt me. As I stood staring, saying nothing,

"Do you like it? Is it becoming?" she called from her place on the floor. "Turn around and let me see."

I wheeled, reluctantly, hesitating:

"People always look nicer in light things."

There was no use talking that way. I saw in her eyes that she recognised instantly the transformation. That rich, exquisite garment, made simple with such cunning skill, gave me the look of stationed ladyhood which belonged to the woman for whom it was originally designed. People would make way for the wearer of the raisin-coloured waist as they had never made way for me in the clothes I bought as cheap as I could, using my best taste and judgment, keeping them clean—but never having had any margin for mere glory and dominance in my wear.

"It's a wonderful colour combination," was all I could say, as I turned again to the glass.

"It's out." Miss Chandler might have been a Roman matron turning down her thumb in death sentence on a vanquished gladiator. "Those pastel tints were just coming in when I bought it—they didn't last very long. I suppose they're considered trying—but it's certainly becoming to your warm, blond colouring and hazel eyes."

"I wonder if I could make——" I slowly drew off the lovely thing.

"Sew, do you mean? Can you sew?" Miss Chandler inquired, with interest.

"Not enough to attempt a waist like this—unless I might copy it from yours," I hesitated. "Would you mind that? We never go to the same places."

"Why not take this one? I'll never wear it again. It was bought in San Francisco, and I found it bound me in the armholes. I got another at the same time—the olive-green one you admired—that I've worn a good deal; but this one's laid by till it's utterly *passé*. If you'd care to remodel it for yourself, take it along."

Miss Chandler's idea of what was "utterly *passé*" was very extreme. I knew that not a stitch was needed on the blouse, yet I hesitated, and finally asked:

"Haven't you got some plain sewing or mending I could do in exchange for it?"

"Oh, certainly!" she laughed, rose straight up, unfolding herself without touching a hand to the floor, went to a drawer and began to pull out silk stockings and underwear. I saw she would enjoy my visits much more after she had set me to work on her things. "There's a skirt to it—somewhere under this stuff; hunt it up and take it, too. Throw your coat over them as you carry them upstairs—though nobody in the house ever saw them."

There were not only skirt and blouse, but a big, shady hat, trimmed with dull grapes and vine leaves, and raisin-coloured suede pumps with ecru silk hose the shade of the Arabian lace. Oh, they were so lovely!—dear as sweet waters in a desert to me who had not had a pretty thing for four years—not since the bits of finery mother's love had compassed for my wedding outfit disappeared. Yet I held off from taking them till I had seen just what I was going to do in exchange for them, and we had what seemed to be a very enjoyable hour to Miss Chandler, going over all her wear, hunting up odd jobs for me. Among other things, I was to break in some shoes, my foot being smaller than hers. There was a whole armload of her silk stockings to darn. After I had them she picked out those that she considered beyond repair, and I put them in order for myself.

It was a pleasant little, feminine, material intimacy that sprung up between us. Our subjects of discussion were mostly confined to clothes and people. Miss Chandler didn't feel about either as I did. I'm a good deal like a setter pup; if I can't love folks—a little anyhow—I hardly know how to get along. She was interested in them mainly from a critical point of view. She was what you

might call a confirmed knocker. She had the high-society way of characterising persons and discussing the affairs of others with the brutal freedom you expect from a day labourer or washerwoman. There's no denying that her outlook on life was cynical. And my outreaching for intellectual food found no response in her. But this hungry heart of mine did love her. Everything about her was so beautiful, and generous—why, I could hardly go down to her room without being offered something. She had two or three of all the articles that most people are glad to possess one of; for instance, she pulled out a very pretty little manicure set one day and insisted on giving it to me, saying carelessly:

“I bought it when a party of us were on a trip—unexpectedly. We went to some outlandish place where there was no manicure in the hotel, and I sent down to the drug store and bought that thing. Take it, child—I don't even know how much it cost. I didn't pay for it myself. You're welcome to it.”

It seemed to be by chance that this surface association with Miss Chandler came to have any quality of real intimacy. I always found her competent, reserved when it came to anything that really concerned her, a little jeering, and not asking favours from anyone—rather giving them. But one Saturday afternoon I had gone down to return some things to her room, tapped at the outer door, got no answer, and went away, though I had felt sure she was in. An hour after, I went back, passed through the hall door, which was unlocked, and rapped at the inner one. This time there came the faint inquiry:

“Is it Orma?”

“No—Mrs. Baird,” I answered, startled at a sort of moaning quality there was in her voice.

I heard a little stir within the room, the key was softly turned, and after a minute Miss Chandler told me to come in. The shades were down, and at first, when I opened the

door, I could see nothing. Then I made out dimly a limp, drowned-looking figure propped on the piled-up pillows of the couch.

"Oh," I said, "I didn't know you were ill."

"I'm not," she sounded more as usual. "Come in. Shut the door. Sit down and talk to me."

"Talk?" I echoed awkwardly.

"Just sit down here by the couch and talk to me—talk of anything. I've got one of my blue spells. I have them about once in so often."

A blue spell! What a way to meet depression! In groping forward I knocked a book from the table and Miss Chandler's voice said peevishly:

"I hate being read to;" then added: "There's nothing in the world the matter with me but the blues—they run in our family. One of my uncles used to get so bad with them that he'd actually go to bed and send for the doctor."

I pulled up a chair close beside her. The room was stuffy, and heavy with incense. I couldn't see the expression of her face, but the lines of that beautiful figure of hers under the clinging folds of the embroidered Oriental robe fairly dripped with woe. Whoever did think of a suitable word to say when suddenly told to talk? I sat there, mum, trying to dig up a cheerful remark, till she broke out:

"The game's not worth the candle. Do you think so? Are you satisfied with life—as it is?"

"Yes—pretty well," I said, "and I've got something better coming."

"What?"

"A position and a salary."

"Ugh!" She moved with a flowing motion from one side to the other. "Where?"

"In an office."

"What's the man's name?" Miss Chandler's voice had a little life in it.

"Harvey Watkins, of McBride, McBride & Watkins." I could think of nothing interesting to add to that.

"A second-rate lawyer," she murmured, finally, in a weary voice. "It seems to me you might do better than that."

"Oh, I'll have to take the place as soon as I'm ready for it," I said. "Harvey's an old friend. He's getting my divorce for me, and advancing the money for me to prepare myself."

"Of course," Miss Chandler accepted the financial statement negligently, as people do who have always had plenty, "but do you think you'll like office work? I imagine it's stupid."

"I don't see that I've got much choice," and I laughed a little. "Anyhow, it's a great improvement on what I've been doing for some years."

"Is it?" She lay staring up at the ceiling a moment, then said, suddenly:

"I remember that Mrs. Harvey Watkins now. Bounder. Thick, stubby, pale woman—village-dressmaker clothes—belongs to improving clubs."

I had got used to her speech; but because of her blues she was slugging a little harder than usual to-day.

"We knew each other as girls," I said. "Delia's a good sort. She's been away ever since I came here."

"Are they separated?"

"I don't know. I've wondered myself sometimes."

"Keeps you guessing, does he? But the idea in the background is that he'll divorce her and marry you—eh?"

"Oh, no, nothing of the sort!" I cried, but to save my life I couldn't keep my voice natural.

"An old dodge," she murmured, as though I hadn't spoken. "A girl's got to play her cards pretty carefully with a man who has a wife to get rid of before he can marry her."

I had to laugh.

"I don't want to marry Harvey," I said. "Not if he was divorced from Delia a thousand times. I've just got to have a job—and he's got one to give me."

She turned on her pillow and stared at me with those light-grey eyes.

"See here, Callie," she said. "You're a man's woman. Every man that comes near you looks at you in just one way. That's what you get—whether you want it or not. What makes you sit there and talk as though you know nothing about men?"

"Well," I said, doggedly, "I can't pick and choose. I've got to make the most of whatever genuine kindness I meet, and put up with what I can't change." I did wish she would get on to some other subject. Her cynicism was depressing. "Do you think I ought to make friends more with women?"

I seemed to have said something amusing at last; she laughed a little, silently.

"Women—humph, they're worse than the men, hounding an unprotected girl. Look at the way the women treated you here in this house."

"They did make it hot for me," I said, "but since you've taken me up, and I'm working for Mr. Dale, things are different."

"Oh, you shine with reflected respectability from me, do you?"

"From you, the great musician," I added.

"Who said I was a great musician?"

"Oh," I joked, "they've told me all about you downstairs—they know, of course. They have the soothing fiction that the reason you won't come down to any of their card parties is because you're so wrapped up in your profession."

"My profession?"

"Well, career—of course, music's a career. They say you're not like most rich girls—contented to be a mere so-

ciety butterfly. They despised me for having to earn a living; but they're tickled to death over the prices you get for your piano talks."

"Much they know about it!" She rolled her head on the cushions scornfully. "Those club lectures wouldn't keep me in nail polish." Then, more to herself than to me: "A rich girl—I wish I were."

I sat back in silence. So this was it. I might have known. What does anybody worry about? Money, nearly always. I had to admire her pluck in keeping up appearances. Flattered, copied, run after—it would all have been over for her the moment they had suspected that she was hard up—pinched for means. I didn't doubt that I had to be economical, but it seemed that Miss Chandler had to be extravagant. Like an echo of my thoughts, she spoke:

"I bought some new things yesterday afternoon—a chiffon scarf with fur on it and a smart turban—in the closet there—let's have them out. I think I could stand a little light now."

The scarf was a beauty; the hat that went with it, a funny little thing like a stew kettle. Miss Chandler asked for another pillow under her shoulders, and inside of five minutes we had the upper closet shelf and half the hooks cleared, and were criticising, trying on, planning more purchases. It cheered her up so well that when Orma brought up the tray, she sent the girl back for another, and I stopped and had dinner with her,

CHAPTER VIII

THE GAP IN THE HEDGE

I GOT used to Boy being out at Las Reudas. Mrs. Eccles called him Jawn, and treated me as a rather undesirable candidate for their acquaintance. People who actually don't care for you to like them always get me; I can't believe it, and keep coming back and trying them again. She picked faults with everything I did for Boy. If I took out some candy she said it was bad for his teeth—which I couldn't deny. If I made it a little new tooth brush the next day, she told me coldly that she'd just bought one. But he thrived so, and she took such good care of him, that my heart was at peace, my energies all freed for my work.

In point of time it was more than two weeks before I saw Harvey Watkins again. Then, so much water had gone under the bridge that, if I had wanted to, I couldn't have got back to the helpless, scared little rustic of that evening at the roadhouse.

I had done a lot of conscientious work to pay for the raisin-coloured dress and its belongings, but they didn't look like clothes that had been sewed for. I couldn't resist wearing the outfit to Las Reudas to let Boy and Mrs. Eccles see it; and, passing through the Poinsettia hall, I had a foretaste of what it was going to do for me. The Martins, Mrs. Thrasher, and some of the others were in there. The whole bunch of them looked at me, and looked again, with real respect. The clothes did it. They could think no evil of the wearer of the raisin-coloured dress! In the old blue serge, a haunter of bargain counters, buying only what was under-priced, I might have been the salt of the earth and remained to them a suspicious character;

but a woman who could afford negligently to put her money where it would buy such quiet elegance as this must have a quietly elegant, proper soul in her.

I went out on the car in high spirits, garnering admiration all along the way, just as crazy for it as any girl, carrying myself better, getting a better colour, I know, and looking nicer in every way because I was admired. I had gone by the Chandler street line; to get up from its station I had to pass the Watkins place. There was Harvey just backing his machine across the sidewalk, and I caught a quick breath. I don't think he knew me at once, but when he did recognise me, he stopped the car, climbed down from it and came up with his hat off to shake hands.

"Well, Calla," he said, pumping my hand up and down, "I thought I never, never, never was going to see you again!"

"I've been very busy," I said, with the kindly air men have when they offer us that explanation.

"You don't look like a working person." He surveyed me from the top vine-leaf and grape of my hat to the tip of my raisin-coloured pumps. The inspection seemed to do something to him—something that I might have brushed the blue serge to pieces and never accomplished. "You're like a sixteen-year-old," was as near as he came to mentioning the dress. "What do you say to bringing J. B. for a little spin in the car?"

"Oh, I guess not, Harvey—thank you. It's nearly seven o'clock. He's always in bed at seven."

"That's what Mrs. Eccles just fought me to a standstill on," Harvey admitted. "Suppose we make it earlier some evening—would you come—with J. B. and me?"

He gave the invitation without looking at me.

"Why—if I could get the time," I hesitated. "You know, I'm working hard in school."

"I thought when a woman had a new dress," he said,

baldly, "she always wanted to go somewhere to show it off."

"This isn't a new dress."

"Well, it's mighty pretty and becoming. You look as sweet and fresh in it as your lilies—come on over and let me get you an armload of them. I planted them here where I could see them always—they're the only callas I got."

"Nonsense, Harvey," I laughed. "I've got to run along," and I started in earnest.

"Say," he called after me, jocosely, "if you don't care to take the time to go riding, you might sometimes let me bring you out from town anyhow—save you a nickel!"

I found Mrs. Eccles getting Boy to bed. She was none too well pleased at his outburst over "pretty muvver" in her new dress, though she herself took an almost human interest in the way it was made. She knew at a glance the cost of such clothes, and I could see that she was eaten up with curiosity. But I had learned wisdom since that night when I obligingly turned myself inside out for a tableful of unsympathetic women. I let her hint and eye me side-wise. I was aching to tell all about it, and crow a little, yet I managed to keep still. She was bound not to show her interest in the dress, so she went on complaining that Mr. Watkins had just been past with his automobile and wanted Jawn to go out riding with him. He got the child all stirred up. She had agreed that they should go tomorrow—at a proper time.

"An' you, too, Muvver," Boy babbled from the crib he was being bundled into. "You an' grammer"—this was the title Mrs. Eccles had provided him with for herself—"an' Fairy, an' me—an' my bud'n."

I kissed him good-bye and went. Mrs. Eccles was so relieved that she offered me some flowers from her garden. I took quite an armload of those queer mauve and purple

things they call old maid's pincushions; they just matched the outfit.

It was neither daylight nor dark, but that sweetest hour of the long twilight we have on this western coast. There was a little new moon swimming in the pink and smoky amethyst of the afterglow. I was as happy as a girl ought to be wearing a pretty new frock and carrying an armload of flowers.

Coming abreast of the Watkins place, I saw a taxi with luggage on it at the curb by the Pendleton bungalow, and a man coming down the long front walk. I quickened my pace, then slowed up; unless I turned back, we should meet squarely. In spite of my manœuvres, this happened. Though I looked straight ahead of me, I saw that it was young Pendleton. He stared, stumbling at the curb because he failed to look where he was going, a hesitating hand rose to lift his hat as he turned at the door of the taxi and gazed after me.

I never in my life refused to speak to anyone, but I gave him such a little acknowledgment that it could scarcely be called a bow, or even a nod. I hurried past, got my car, and was halfway to San Vicente and had forgotten him, when I noticed a taxi with luggage on it running beside us. I drew back from the window. From that time on I would miss the machine, and then find it had only been travelling on the other side of the car or taking some parallel street for a short distance. When we got in town I thought I had lost it for good, but as I was going up the steps of the Poinsettia it came in sight. While I was unlocking the door it passed slowly along in front.

I was at work in school next day when the red-headed girl who helped Mrs. Phipps with the housework called me to the telephone and stopped frankly leaning in the door to listen while I answered. I knew why when Boy's excited little voice came over the wire.

"Muvver"—I could feel the effort of his shouting—"can you go ride in our automobile?"

"No, Jackie Boy," I said, "mother can't get time to-day. You go ride in the nice automobile."

Boyce paused, apparently for consultation with someone.

"Say," said the girl beside me, "you're not turning down a chance for an automobile ride, are you?"

I nodded. Boy was beginning to go, "Uk—uk—well, Muvver, say," at the other end of the line. His funny, broken talk mixed with the girl's remarks when she spoke again:

"Well, don't do it. What do you want to work like a nigger for? You are losing your colour already. Tell 'em you're going—go on—tell 'em yes. Then get into your glad rags and fly."

When she stopped, Boy's tune sounded almost the same.

"—an' wear the pretty dress an' the new hat, Muvver. We're a-goin' to be at your school when (when, Uncle Harvey?)—going to be there when it's four o'clock."

That seemed to end it. I should have to get excused to run home and dress—but I could make up the work.

The trip up into the hills was enjoyable, and after that I went out to Las Reudas in Harvey's machine occasionally, for, unless I avoided him, we were apt to be starting at the same time, since I now ate at the cafeteria in the basement of the Cronin Building, and he dined at his club, the St. Vincent, across the square. He never took the street that led past Mrs. Eccles's place—though I was sure he went that way when he was alone—and always stopped at his own house and let me walk around to see Boy. It was the drug store at the corner of the side street and the Poinsettia over again. I despised and chafed at his caution—yet was obliged to give it a low approval. Mrs. Eccles was a good deal of a gossip; she had told me stories in

plenty about the Pendletons by this time; yes, I had to admit that he was no more than wise.

As a girl in Stanleyton I never had much of Harvey's undiluted society; there were always other people about; these trips together gave me the first chance to know him really. I would be tired after my day's school work, thinking a good deal about clothes for myself and Boy; it was very convenient to let him start on the inexhaustible subject—himself—and just make the proper responses now and then to give him to understand I was listening.

He would talk about himself endlessly—and with such heavy earnestness; about his miserable boyhood, his early struggles, and the way he had, in his own opinion, met the world single-handed and overcome it. He told me a good many things about his cases—business secrets, where he'd conceal the name, only saying carelessly, "That's a thing you mustn't repeat, Calla," occasionally adding, "Lord, it's a comfort to have somebody to talk to that you can trust. I've never had a soul." He never tired of describing to me how he downed all opponents. I suppose the cave man used to go home to the cave woman and tell her how he just tapped the bear on the back of the neck and it fell dead, or how easy it was for him to whip a dozen other cave men who came out after him. I am sure the cave woman didn't fail to say "Oh" and "Ah" at the right spots; keep the masculine thing going with his recitation of his own triumphs—as seen through his eyes!

However, I preferred this kind of talk to his complaints of Delia; but, sooner or later, these always came in. He wouldn't be headed off from telling how she ran after him before they were married, from describing the manœuvres of her mother to land him. According to him, their married life was a blank, a wilderness, a desert; they were mismated—strangers to each other. Though I might be disposed to discount this sort of thing, I did realise that it

looked significant for Delia to be remaining in another county so long. Three months it would take me to acquire residence in San Vicente County so that a divorce bill might be filed. Could it be that Delia was gaining residence in some other county for a similar purpose? It was none of my business; I wished he wouldn't force it on my attention; but, of course, if he was going to be a widower for the second time, a man of his sort would be already "looking around."

He had that other pleasant little fashion of telling you about meals he had just eaten. I know perfectly well that the cave man used to say to the long-suffering woman, "I found a bee tree—honey—yum-yum-yum!" Or he'd come home when the poor thing was as hungry as a wolf and tell her how he dug up a colony of lovely, fat bugs. I realised what the cave woman's feelings must have been when we'd go tooling along the pleasant road toward Las Reudas, Harvey cataloguing steadily, exactly, relishingly, every item of his elaborate St. Vincent Club dinner. If I had dined at the basement cafeteria, choosing lamb stew because it was cheap and filling, and finding an outcast flavor of goat about the meat, it sometimes made me almost too grumpy to put in the little responses that were expected. But one evening, when I had missed my dinner entirely and he began to praise the St. Vincent chef and talk about chicken à la King, I stopped him with:

"I wish you wouldn't talk so much about eating."

"Why?" The well-fed man looked around at me, surprised that I failed to like this subject, so agreeable to him.

"Oh, nothing; only I haven't had a bite since twelve o'clock."

"You haven't?" He gazed at me as though I had been a perishing survivor of an Arctic expedition. A man's horror at irregular meals will always remain a mystery to a woman. "Since twelve o'clock—and you hard at work in school! We'll stop at Burmeister's and take some stuff

up. You can fix a little dinner for yourself at my house, can't you?"

"Oh, I could," I hesitated; "but I'd better wait and have something to eat when I get back to town."

Harvey was not listening. He stopped the car in front of the beautiful little plate-glass-windowed Burmeister branch store at the foot of the Las Reudas hill and, without asking me what he should buy for my dinner, got down and went in, coming back presently, a salesman following to put a well-filled tray-box into the tonneau. Plainly Harvey was an experienced marketer.

"You think that'll be all?" the white-aproned boy asked as we were ready to drive away.

"Yes—it'll do for to-night," Harvey replied, and we were off.

I love to cook—it's one of my few little talents. And Delia's kitchen was a dear delight of a place, with its white tiling and every contrivance for making work light and easy. Poor Delia! As I handled her dainty little saucepans, and watched Harvey solemnly peeling and slicing and preparing things, I wondered acutely what she was really planning to do. Would she come back to use these clever kettles and patent beaters and cutters again? Or was she going to divorce Harvey? It made me feel almost as though I were trying to pry into her personal affairs, and I put the question out of my mind. It was a good dinner that we cooked. I don't know where I got the impression that it was I who inspired Harvey's efforts. A more suspicious person would have seen that he showed plenty of practice. When it came to eating, he joined me, and praised everything as though I alone had been responsible for the excellence, repeating again and again, "Say, you can cook for me!"

As we were cleaning up and putting things away, he called my attention to the fact that there was plenty of

stuff for another dinner; before I knew it, I had let him assume that we were going to cook and eat that dinner the next evening. We did, Harvey adding a beautiful thick steak, which he brought out from town for the purpose and broiled himself in a fashion of his own. He was on his very best behaviour; no possible exception could be taken to anything he said or did or even looked; but through it all there was a sense of uneasiness at the back of my head. In spite of this, we were quite gay as we washed up after the meal, when a rap suddenly sounded on the kitchen door. Harvey was at work at the sink, so I opened the door. A Chinaman stood there looking at me. He was a healthy, round-faced fellow, the pink showing through the yellow on his cheeks.

"Hello!" he said, and grinned familiarly.

"What is it?" I asked. "Who did you want to see?"

Without answering, he pushed past and went over to the sink.

"Hello, Wo Far!" said Harvey, looking up from the skillet he was cleaning. "What do you think you want?"

The Chinaman just stood looking coolly about at everything in the room with that odd, half-jeering air that they have sometimes. He finally announced that he had come to fetch Harvey's Oriental dressing-gown away to be mended.

"All right, Wo—you know where it hangs," Harvey said, and the man went upstairs. He came back soon, the robe across his arm, and stopped again in the kitchen.

"You cook?" he asked; and then, grinning, "No good, I think." He gave me another look as he went out, laughing—a look that made my face burn.

If Harvey noticed it, he didn't show it. I said nothing to him, but got away as soon as I could, and when next I had an invitation to go out in the machine, I told him flat that I never would again. He didn't ask for any explanation. What he said was:

"Oh—if you feel that way. I think you're foolish—and some other things—but you're the one to say."

I suppose the "other things" meant mostly ingratitude, but I couldn't help it; it was just that way. As long as I didn't have any divorce and was in fear that Boy could be taken away from me, I felt obliged to overlook things—his attitude toward me, his continual reflections on Delia—but with the approach of freedom and security in this matter, I began to feel independent. And I didn't dodge meeting Harvey when I was going out to Las Reudas. I would nod to him if I encountered him in the hall, or as he stood cranking up his machine, and walk past him down to the corner to wait for my car. He didn't seem to resent my attitude; he was just as friendly as ever. I think he liked me all the better.

So the days went by. Harvey came back from those week-end absences of his with a grudge at all the world, and a belief that it was somebody's duty to smooth him down. On two of these Sundays I had Boy in at the Poinsettia with me. Nothing was said against it, and with the friendlier footing there, he was even noticed pleasantly and petted a bit by the Martins. The necessary term of residence in San Vicente County was nearly over. Harvey had done some shrewd bargaining with Oliver, the details of which I need not repeat; got the understanding that my husband would not contest the suit, and even the promise of a little money, paid over for a cow my mother had given to Boyce as a calf. She was a Jersey, and the allowance was to be a hundred dollars, Oliver promising, characteristically, to pay it as he could, twenty-five dollars at a time.

Then, one Friday afternoon, when Harvey was due to be leaving for the week-end, he unexpectedly called me on the 'phone at school and asked me to stop in at his office on my way out. His voice sounded so solemn and queer that I asked him if there was anything the matter.

"I'd rather break it to you here," he said, in reply. "Don't fail to come in."

I just grabbed my hat and ran, and I got into Harvey's office all out of breath.

"Sit down, Calla," he said, in the muffled tones of an undertaker.

I couldn't move after he spoke to me. I was rigid with terror. It must be about Boyce.

"Tell me, quick!" I whispered.

A long, thick envelope lay on his desk. He picked it up and held it toward me.

"It is my painful duty," he said, "to break the news to you that—that——"

Things had begun to whirl. Was I going to faint? He reached forward suddenly, took me by the shoulders and swung me into a chair.

"—that your divorce is granted," he crowed, triumphantly. And this was Harvey's idea of a joke!

"Did I scare you?" he asked, as I sat there trembling, trying to pull myself together, and not see things all jiggling and falling down around me. I hadn't a word to answer him. I couldn't be angry. He thought he was smart. He was laughing in the most heartfelt manner at his own wit, and apologising, too, for having carried it quite so far.

"Never mind," I said. "I'm so thankful. It's all settled, is it, Harvey? Nothing can go wrong with it now?"

"This is the interlocutory decree," he explained. "It isn't made final for a year. If you get married inside of twelve months, you'll be committing bigamy." He was still jocular. "I'm obliged to warn you. Otherwise your decree holds in every respect."

"Boy?"

"You've got complete control of him," Harvey nodded. "Nobody can touch him without your consent."

I sat and looked at the floor until I could get voice enough to speak again; then said:

"Harvey, I thank you more than words can tell," and jumped up and started for the door.

"Hey! Where you going?" he asked, wonderingly.

"Straight out to Las Reudas to have a look at my son," I said. "I wish I hadn't promised to let him go with Mrs. Eccles to her daughter's over at Corinth. I'll have to hurry to catch them before they start."

"Say!" Harvey was suddenly natural and like himself. "I forgot all about celebrating this. Of course we ought to—and here's this banquet of the bar association on my hands—and a speech to make. If it wasn't for that, we'd sure have a big time this evening."

I halted reluctantly near the door. He considered a moment.

"Shucks!" he said. "I won't see you again for two weeks. I'm leaving with that bunch of solons in the morning for their Yosemite trip."

"Then I'll bid you good-bye now," I said, stepping back to offer my hand; "and oh, thank you again and again."

We shook hands. Harvey looked at me rather wistfully, and hesitated:

"Say, Calla, as long as you're going to be out there this evening, I wonder if it would be too much to ask of you to stop in at my place and give me the once over. You see, I've got that speech to make—it's full dress—and I'm no good when it comes to an evening tie. Will you, Calla? I could bring you back to town in the machine."

Why hadn't I gone out quickly in the first place? I just couldn't refuse him.

"Well," I agreed, reluctantly, "if I'm out there that late."

"But I'm not going to be late," Harvey followed me to the door to insist. "I'm closing up here right now. Please

do come in—you might give me a word of help about the speech.”

I still had to go up and put my desk in order, and get some carbon paper to take home for Mr. Dale's Saturday work. All through it I was swinging to a realisation of this new thing that had come to me—actual freedom. I hadn't known how it would make me feel; how great the difference would be. When I got out to Las Reudas late and found Mrs. Eccles had missed a train waiting for me, and was cross about it, for the first time she couldn't make me feel reproved. I hugged Boy, whispered to him that I loved him ten million bushels, and let him go. The San Vicente, Las Reudas & Corinth trains ran an hour apart, so that it was almost night when I got to the Watkins place, and saw Harvey's car out in front. The house was dark; the porch light not on; but the front door was ajar, and at the sound of my step Harvey called from above for me to come up.

I went slowly, feeling a fool, and stopped in the upper hall, asking:

“Where are you? Where do you want me?”

“Out here.” His voice came from the sleeping porch.

I went on through the bedroom, with its twin brass beds, Harvey's business suit that he had taken off flung about, the room flaring with light, and stopped in the door that led to the sleeping porch. Harvey was getting a little parcel from the table that stood at the head of his bed there. His blue silk pajamas lay on the foot of the cot, ready for him when he should return from the banquet, late. He was in his dress suit.

“I'd about given you up,” he groaned, with his back to me; then turned, pulling open the package, and drawing out some white lawn ties. “I never could get one of these things to look decent. You tie it for me, Calla.”

“I don't know whether I'm an expert,” I hesitated.

“You can do it better than I can,” he urged.

Harvey Watkins was not the kind of man who can wear evening clothes well or becomingly, but this was evidently a secret from Harvey. I suppose he had them on three or four times a year, for grand occasions, and they made him feel as pretty and as worked up as a girl going to a party.

He handed me one of the new ties. I took it, and glanced at the rumpled one that straggled across his broad expanse of dress shirt-front.

"You'll have to have another collar," I said. "You've mussed that one buttoning it."

He pulled one out of the parcel.

"I always spoil two or three. You button it, Calla," and he hauled off the soiled one.

It was funny to see how helpless the sheer excitement of getting dressed for his party made him. He took hold of the lapels of his coat, gravely easing it back out of my way, craning his neck a little as I stood on tiptoe for the awkward job. I had finally got the collar on, the tie around it, and was beginning on the bow when I realised all at once that Harvey had shifted his interest. His eyes, which had been wandering, so that I had felt sure he was conning over his speech, were fixed intently on mine. The hands that held his coat back were relaxing; one of them let go entirely.

"Calla!" There was a tremor in his voice.

"Keep that lapel out of my way," I said sharply, and hurried. What had made me maddest that night at the roadhouse was the realisation that Harvey wasn't trying to behave; that he had deliberately let himself go. Now I could see the constraint he used, and it scared me. I jerked the bow into hasty shape and backed off.

"There, that's all right," I said, and, with a sudden inspiration, "I'll get you a flower for your buttonhole."

"What's your hurry?" Harvey tried to speak jocosely, as he half blocked my way to the door.

"I've got to get home," I said, shortly. "I'm doing

some typing for Mr. Dale to-night," and slipped around him, calling back as I ran down the stairs, "I'll wait with the flower on the porch."

Out on the lawn in the moonlight I drew a free breath. I crossed to where the gardenias grew near that gap in the pittosporum through which I had once seen Pendleton lying on his sleeping porch reading. As I passed the bungalow this evening it was all dark; he must still be away.

It wasn't easy to find the gardenias; the moonlight on the leaves made them look like blossoms; and I wanted to choose a nice, full-blown one. I was bent close down over them when a sound in the Pendleton bungalow startled me; a door opened; a step came out on the sleeping porch. Every flower on the gardenia bush stood out in a blaze of light as someone snapped on the electric there, and I pulled one. But if I raised up I should be in plain sight of whoever that was. While I crouched, uncertain, almost ready to drop on hands and knees and creep away, a man's voice spoke on the porch—and a woman's answered.

My muscles jerked me up straight; I stared through the gap in the hedge, into the face of—Miss Eugenia Chandler!

Yes, Miss Chandler, but as I had never seen her, flushed, laughing, animated, all seductive feminine grace—and in negligée. Twisted alluringly around her slim figure was a delicate, rose-coloured robe I had re-hemmed and altered; my fingers had sewed the little rosebuds down by the ear on that boudoir cap that covered her charmingly dishevelled head.

She saw me at the same instant; her face changed frightfully; with a look that pierced my heart she threw up a sheltering arm between us. Her cry brought the man around to stare at me, too. It was young Pendleton. There we stood, I on my side of the hedge, wishing the earth would open and swallow me; they on theirs—dis-

covered—exposed. Then Miss Chandler's other hand went groping back and switched off the lights.

I crawled back to the house. I sat on the steps a while to get hold of myself, cringing at remembrance of Mrs. Eccles's fling about Pendleton and his loose women. In a small town there are always two or three mysteriously shameful women whom the village girls regard as of different flesh and blood, outcast beings with whom they could have nothing in common. Even Milt Stanley's wife, after her name got so bad, had been a person that my mother could exchange a few words with, but I must just dodge speaking to her if I could, or merely nod at her. There I sat and held my head and tried to think. Miss Chandler—my Miss Chandler—well-born, well-bred—cool and distainful with a lot of common, decent, uninteresting folks—the girl who had been so lavishly kind to me, was—that! It was no use. I couldn't get any realisation of it. I almost forgot about Harvey till he called to me from above, in what tried to be a very careless tone:

"That you, Calla?"

"Yes." Instinctively I guarded my voice. All at once I was in a fever to be off, to get home where I could be alone. "I've got the flower for your coat. Do hurry!"

He waited quite a while, hoping, perhaps, that I would bring the flower up. Evidently he hadn't quite the face to suggest that, for at last he came slowly down in the dark.

Memories of a thousand little things all through my companionship with Miss Chandler were starting up in my mind, rawly significant. Terribly taken up with them, I wasn't disposed to waste much worry on Harvey and his actions. I rather hated to have him light the hall light, but I told him to do it, kept outside till he had, then went in quickly and put the flower on his coat.

"What's the matter?" he asked, with a swift glance toward the door. "What's happened?"

"Nothing," I answered, short and sharp. "Let's get away from here."

"Did something frighten you?" Harvey was following as I led the way out.

"No. It's nothing. I've got to get back to town." I felt Harvey's breath on my cheek as he whispered close to my ear:

"To Dale?"

"To my work." I hurried down the walk. At the curb by the machine I faced him, and added, "Harvey, can I ride home with you? If not, there's the street car."

"All right—all right." Harvey dropped his head. He made no protest as I got into the tonneau. How easy it would have been to do this at any time! He cranked up, got in, and there was hardly a word said between us till he drove the car straight up before the Poinsettia and let me out.

CHAPTER IX

MISS CHANDLER'S POINT OF VIEW

INSTEAD of going straight in when Harvey left me on the steps of the Poinsettia, I turned off at a right angle, went down the arbour and rapped on the bungalow door. Mr. Dale yelled at me to come in; I realised that I was late and he was mad about it. Well, he was due to be madder yet; I stood there on the step till he came and opened the door, and then said, without a word of preface or apology:

"I can't work to-night."

"Sick?" His tone was anxious, but I knew the anxiety was all for the job in hand.

"No," I shook my head; "I just can't work." And I went, and left him staring after me.

I didn't sleep that night. Miss Chandler had left the Poinsettia Thursday evening; she would be back some time at the first of the week; when I tried to think how I should meet her, what she would say, I just sort of went to pieces—I couldn't imagine it. In all the turmoil of my thoughts the thing that continually came uppermost was a wish to have her know that her secret was safe with me, that I would as soon hurt myself as hurt her. I wanted her to be assured of that, yet shrank from the idea of seeing her to give her the assurance. I thought of writing her a little note to meet her on her return, but the things I had to say weren't safe to put on paper. They'd have to be said—and forgotten.

Through it all I'd come back again and again to those clothes hanging in my closet. I got up and switched on the light to look at them. The sight put me at my wit's end. I had got them for about a tenth of their value in

sewing. They were in the nature of a gift. The little manicure set was given me out and out, and now her careless description of the way it had been bought came back to me with unbearable significance. By morning I knew that I never could put on the raisin-coloured outfit again—and wondered how I was going to get along without it.

I couldn't go back to the old blue serge—I oughtn't to. To succeed you've got to look successful. How about that cow money? Twenty-five dollars of it might come in any time. On my way to school there was a big plate-glass window with some very pleasing suits and blouses in it and a card that said, "Your credit is good here." I got on my hat, hurried down there, and found a better suit than any I'd seen in the windows, a soft, dead-leaf brown, delicately relieved with a touch of colour and lace in the blouse. The price, of course, was more than it would have been for cash. Then we came to the question of payment. They asked me where I lived, where I worked, and what my salary was. Well, if I had to be hung, it shouldn't be for a lamb.

"The Poinsettia—McBride, McBride & Watkins," I said, calmly, and mentioned the salary Harvey had promised.

I carried the suit home myself.

Mrs. Eccles was bringing Boy in to the Poinsettia at noon. I found her in my room when I got back. She was about the last person I should have chosen to see just then, but when I had Boy striding around with his hands in his pockets, shouting out the news of Fairy and the ducks, I felt for the first time that all my world wasn't collapsing and falling into chaos. I had to hurry them off because I was due at Mr. Dale's.

My work with him went hard. He had a perfect right to complain of me—and made full use of it. We finally quit in a sort of squabble, he cross and I ready to cry,

barely two-thirds of the work done, the rest going over to Sunday morning.

"We won't keep on," he said, when it got so dusky I could hardly see. "If you're this by daylight, God forbid we should tackle it by electric! We'll quit—and pray for better to-morrow."

Sunday morning I had prayed all right, but the work went worse than ever. I could see it made him angry enough to shake me that I didn't get down into the collar and pull, as he put it. How could I concentrate on the keyboard when my mind was flying off at a tangent every two minutes? Had Miss Chandler got back yet? Should I find her there in the house when I went in? How was I going to meet her? What was I going to do? Could I help her? I was as reckless about trying to as a man who couldn't swim and who jumps into the water to rescue a drowning person. It never occurred to me that I might be pulled down in the struggle. The impulse I had to leave the Poinsettia, to get out now—to-day—and look for new quarters, was sheer cowardice—a shrinking from seeing her hurt and humiliated by the sight of me.

It was about three o'clock when Mr. Dale and I stumbled to the place where he said shortly that he could finish now himself, and I might go—to the devil, I thought he really wanted to add. I was halfway through the arbour that led out front when I saw a taxi glide up. I held back the vines; the driver got down, a suit-case in his hand, opened the door, and out stepped Miss Chandler. They went in; I lingered there till the man came back and drove away. Yet, when I finally did slip inside, her door still stood open, and she called to me. I pretended not to hear, and went past almost on a run. I had hardly got my breath from the stairs when there was a tap on my door. It was Orma, all of a smile, eating from an opened box of candy.

"Miss Chandler's got back—gee, she's one peach es-

quire! Have a piece of candy? She said for you to run down to her room a minute."

It had come. I shut my eyes—and opened them again. Around me were the shabby walls that had grown to seem home. Downstairs was the one woman in all San Vicente who had really cared whether I lived or died. Mrs. Tipton was kind enough; I liked her—— Oh, there's no use trying to sort out the reason you feel bound to one person and not to another. It isn't gratitude; it isn't even having tastes in common. Miss Chandler and I didn't have that; but some real tenderness there must have been, for I felt myself fairly drowning in pity, anxiety, the helpless desire to help—to do something for her.

I got as far as the lower hall, facing her outside door, and found it ajar. She herself, in the little entry, pulling down a robe to replace her street dress, spoke to me without turning her head:

"Come in—I've got something to say to you."

She had something to say to *me*! That, and her tone, stopped me like a shot. Then I followed her in, braced for something different from what I had expected. We didn't look squarely at each other, but I realised that I was the scared one. She pushed toward me with her foot the chair I liked—a little mahogany rocker that had been her mother's—got into the robe, and went to the dress closet for her slippers. I stood glancing about at the sober, rich, luxurious furnishings. For two days, whatever I looked at, I had been seeing this room—seeing myself go into it; then breaking off in terror of what would be said when I got here.

"Sit down—sit down," her voice called, as her pumps clattered to the closet floor. "What are you so solemn about?"

At the moment I couldn't; I laid my hand on the chair back and with an effort faced her as she came out. Now that I did look directly at her, I saw that a little dull red



“TRUST YOU?” SHE SAT UP SUDDENLY FROM HER
LOLLING POSITION. “WELL—HOW ABOUT YOU?
DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU CAN TRUST ME?”

glowed under her hard, defiant eyes; that slim, elegant figure of hers was drawn up tense as she pulled the robe around it. Oh, I wished she wouldn't take it like this!

"Please don't," I choked.

"Don't what?"

She dropped down sidewise, tucking one foot up under her, leaning back over the great cushioned arm of her chair, as I had so often seen her, posed like a Bacchante just flung down from the dance.

"Don't tell me anything. I'd rather not know. You can trust me without that."

"Trust you?" She sat up suddenly from her lolling position. "Well—how about you? Do you feel that you can trust me?"

A moment I gaped, stupid. Then in a flash I saw what she was driving at. Yet, strangely, even this didn't seem to matter very much. It was only human—this trying to pull another down, to make her own case look better.

"You're mistaken," I began.

Her teeth came together with a click. She leaned forward and stared at me savagely.

"You're not going to put up a front with me—with me—are you?"

"No," I floundered; "never mind about me. My little boy boards out there, you know—with Mrs. Eccles, just back of—on Fern street. I'd been to see him. I——"

"Callie Baird, do you mean to deny that you were at the Watkins house when Al Pendleton and I saw you through the hedge?"

"I'm not denying anything," I said. "I really went out to see Boy, and then I stopped in at—Harvey asked me—I told you Harvey Watkins was an old friend and going to give me a position. Friday evening I'd just——"

Miss Chandler sank back with a little breath that was half laughter, half relief.

"Oh," she said, "then you don't deny it?"

This was so different from anything I could have imagined, it stung me to retort.

"I'm not answerable to you; I don't have to justify myself to you—if I tried, you wouldn't believe me. Orma said you wanted me to come down here. I came because I supposed you wanted——"

"To beg you to keep still about what you'd seen—eh? But when we come to what *I* saw—nothing doing!" She flung her hand round in front of my face and snapped her fingers. I had never seen her do a coarse thing before. "I was on one side of the hedge with a man—you were on the other with——"

My face was flaming. Hers was pale, as always, except for those two unusual spots of dull red. It was my turn to interrupt.

"If you keep on talking to me that way—I'll go." I dropped my hand from the chair back and half turned to the door.

"No, you won't!" She shot the words at me. "You'll stay right here in this room till you and I come to some sort of understanding. Sit down, why don't you? Oh—too virtuous to sit down in my room? Well, you certainly have nerve!"

"Why are you so angry?" I said, stupidly. "I don't set myself up to judge you."

"Cut that short!" she cried. "I can't take very much of it—from you."

"No," I said, in despair, "there's no use to talk. You'll never have to take anything from me again."

She seemed to notice for the first time my new dress. A sudden change came over her. She swallowed nervously, and half whispered:

"I believe you're in earnest. Well, you're a fool to quarrel with me, anyhow."

"Oh," I cried, miserably, "I'm not quarrelling with you. I've been almost crazy ever since Friday evening—scared

to death. Suppose someone else had seen what I did? If you think of nothing but the risk——”

“That’s so funny—for you to say.” Miss Chandler laughed. When had I ever heard her laugh aloud! “You’re the most reckless creature I ever knew. If I managed my affairs as you do yours——”

“You have a right to criticise me there,” I said.

“I guess I have—coming here to the Poinsettia—using Joe Ed’s room.”

“Yes—I know now that seemed suspicious to those women downstairs.”

Again Miss Chandler laughed. I seemed to be making myself very amusing.

“Well, how about Joe Tipton?”

“How about him?” I echoed like an idiot.

“Yes—how about him?” She spoke impatiently.

It would have been too silly to tell of the few little letters I’d had from Joe Ed. I didn’t want her making something wrong of them, and of his perfectly innocent, boyish admiration. I just told her, as I had Harvey, that he seemed like a child to me, and was wandering and maundering on about my bitter experience making me feel older, when she caught me up suddenly.

“Yes. Just so—but I hardly think you’re mothering that Watkins man—are you?”

I made no answer.

“Or Hollis Dale?”

“Frank Hollis Dale doesn’t know I’m alive,” I snapped, “except that I’m a typist—and not nearly as good a one as he’d like to have.”

For a long minute Miss Chandler leaned back silent. Several times she shook her head; once she drew quick breath to speak, but checked herself. Finally she jumped up and stood staring at me angrily.

“Well, have it your own way; suppose you have kept the letter of the law—so far? It’s only a matter of time with

a girl of your sort—pretty—green as a gourd—drifting about from one man's office to another. You've got to face life as you find it—make the best of things as they are—not as the preachers tell us they are."

"Well, I'm trying to do that," I said, shortly. It did seem a farce for her to lecture me. "I've got to consider both myself—and a child. A mother owes——"

"Piffle!" she broke in on me. "You mean by that you'll drudge like a dog through all your best years, lose your good looks and attractions, never have anything for yourself, all to raise another human being that isn't any better or any worse than you are?"

"A mother owes a clean record to her children," I said, doggedly. "Boyce didn't ask me to be born. He's a four-year-old baby—with no say-so. Before he came I lived every day and night of my married life with the thought of suicide. I couldn't do that now—I don't belong to myself alone."

"Ugh!" Miss Chandler shrugged disgustedly. "You're a mush of sentiment, Callie. I guess the child's got to live, hasn't he? And have an education? A chance in life? Who's paying his board out there now? What ails you is that you won't face things. If the child's all, let me tell you you could do a lot better for him than you are." I tried to interrupt; she silenced me with a motion. "You could live nicely, stand better than you do now—and have him with you—wait—wait—hear me out!—if you'd show a little common sense. You'll inevitably attract men—the question is what are you going to do with that attraction? It's eat or be eaten. Are you going to play the poor little shabby country girl just come to town—every man's prey—or are you going to use such sense as you've got and prey on them?"

"Nobody's going to prey on me," I said.

"Wait!" Miss Chandler flung the one syllable out meaningly; then added, "Some you don't even have to

wait for. But they all come to it at last. Beat them to it. And keep sentiment out of such affairs, or they make a victim of you—just as marriage does. Feeling—I'm done with it!" Her face was black.

"Don't talk that way," I protested.

She dropped into her chair and spoke quietly.

"Sit down and listen to me, Callie. It won't hurt you. I've got to tell you where I invested my feelings, and what I got by it."

Without a word I took the little chair, and she talked right on.

"When my parents died—within a week of each other—I was abroad, with the first Mrs. Hoard; she'd gone for an operation and I to study music. The judge was left administrator and guardian. When I came home I lived with them." She wheeled sharply on me. "You've seen Judge Hoard?"

I had, several times, at the McBride office. He was a fine, haughty-looking man, such as you might expect to be high-handed with a young girl's love affairs.

"Mrs. Hoard was an invalid. He's the biggest-brained man I ever knew—nearly as old as my father, yet I was crazy about him, perfectly happy with his promise of marriage when he should be free to marry." She flared a sudden glance at me. "What do you think of the man who seduced his eighteen-year-old ward, his dead partner's daughter—under such circumstances?"

"Oh, dreadful!" I cried.

"Not so much worse than others," she said, coldly. "You don't think that your friend Watkins would treat you like that, maybe, or Hollis Dale; but I'm here to tell you that men are pretty much alike—take them on the side of sex. Judge Hoard's wife died when I was twenty-one. Our affair had been going on more than three years. By that time I was living with this cousin of mine; Celia was a rich widow. Our secret meetings slacked up a little—

it was as though he drew off before beginning openly to court me. That's what he gave me to understand. He was courting my cousin on the sly. I came back from a little southern trip to find them married."

It was very still in the room. Outside the ting, ting, ting, ting of a scissors grinder went slowly by. Miss Chandler began to tap with her slipper on the carpet.

"Well," she said, "I was finished. I was done with sentiment. I'd adored that man—been as big a fool about him as a girl could be. And I hated him now just as thoroughly. I stayed right there in the house; Cousin Celia asked me, and it was a good way to get even with him. He'd treat me like that, would he, and think he could get by with it? I showed him. He hadn't much—my father was the money-maker of the firm. But I took what he had, and I made his life a burden to him when it gave out and he wouldn't go to Celia for more."

I thought of the clothes, jewelry, and all sorts of stuff that I had seen brought into that room to crowd the places of articles just about as good, almost as new—it would be impossible to keep Eugenia Chandler's pockets filled. I had seen Judge Hoard and his wife together. Nobody could doubt that he really loved the woman he had married; that the peace of his latter years was all in her hands. I imagined his dread and hatred of this wild girl against whom he had sinned, with her insatiable demands for money.

"Oh, let them alone," I pleaded. "You only poison your own life trying to punish him."

"No," obstinately, "I'm going to shake him down once more."

Again the room was still. I sat with my head down, my hands gripped tight in my lap. What she had told me of the judge was to set herself right in my eyes; instead, it only put me in despair of her—of everybody—of

life. I couldn't hold back my tears any longer; sobs began to shake me.

"For goodness' sake!" there was a queer, new tone in Miss Chandler's voice, "did I hurt your feelings some way?"

"No," I choked; "I'm just heartbroken for you."

"Well!" she said. Her hand went up to her lips, and she eyed me. "Did you ever! Is there anybody else on earth that would take it like that—that would care that much? Callie—don't! If you get me to crying, we'll bring the house down; I'm a whale at it. Do say something cheerful, child."

"All right," I gasped. I shook the tears from my face and jumped to my feet. Miss Chandler got up the minute I did. "We'll forget it."

"And you won't leave the Poinsettia—because I'm here?"

"No—no, not if you'd rather I'd stay."

"Poor Callie!" She laughed a little, but I saw her mouth tremble. "I do want you to stay. I'll let you alone—but it'll be kind of—well, nice, you know—to see your face in the halls."

CHAPTER X

DELIA'S ADDRESS

I KEPT out of Miss Chandler's room. When we'd meet in the hall she seemed just as usual, except for a queer little laughing devil in her eyes that made her look much prettier and more fascinating. I had quite a lot of her work, and my sewing things were all among her belongings. I finally went down to straighten this up. And the minute I got into her room she started talking right where we had left off last time, going at it as if we'd been barely interrupted by the shutting of a door. I was at a disadvantage with this elegant, polished woman of the world, used to setting the pace in her circle, one who felt she had sanction for whatever she chose to do. Rules and regulations were for folks below her in understanding. She seemed to think it a compliment to me not to be rated with them. I didn't want to hurt her feelings by appearing to preach or hold myself better than she was. Altogether it was very confusing and painful.

I'd be down on my knees before her little sewing stand trying to sort out spool silk or find my small scissors or my tape line, and she'd stop me so as to get my undivided attention and emphasise her points. The first time I was so upset that I didn't get a thing I came after. I had to go back next day. I did better then—just said yes and no and tried to keep my mind on my errand, and once or twice afterward I managed the same way. Yet I never saw her now that she didn't have something new and disturbing to say about her revenge on Judge Hoard.

"He hasn't got anything left—of his own; I pretty well cleaned him out," she remarked. It seemed strange to hear her, whom I was used to see all generosity (yes, and

true affection—toward me) go on, "but Celia's Alaska properties have taken a jump. Nobody knows what those mines will amount to yet—half a million, maybe. Now is my time. I'll have a hundred thousand of it, and the Judge will give it to me." When she said that she glanced at my face. I suppose I did look sort of sick, for she wound up, good-naturedly, "I forgot that scared you. I won't repeat it—but you'll see!"

But what she spoke oftenest about was an auto trip four of them were planning to make up to the Pendleton camp above Meaghers. She wanted me to go. I wasn't answering or objecting to anything she said. I felt hopeless, but she went on arguing as though I had. "It needn't make any difference that the place is in the neighbourhood of your old home, Callie. We'll go in with a chauffeur and cook from San Francisco, and none of the neighbours need see anything of us." I took it she had made a good many such trips before, but I didn't ask. I couldn't preach to her; I wasn't, in fact, prepared to meet her arguments.

"Oh, Miss Chandler—don't! You promised you wouldn't," I fairly whimpered at last. She only laughed at me. And after that I just meekly said nothing, and finally kept out of her way.

One thing remained to me from her talk as a light on my personal affairs. She was no hypocrite, and I couldn't defend Harvey when she called him one. But when she spoke slightly of Delia, I remembered Dele's coming, a young lady from a larger town, and making so much of me when I was a village high school girl; I remembered how fond I'd been of her; and I made up my mind to get that address from Harvey as soon as he got back to San Vicente and write to her. Looking back, it seemed perfectly inexplicable that I hadn't done this before. What could she possibly think if I met her in after years and she knew that I'd been in San Vicente so long, out at her house, go-

ing about with Harvey—though it might be at the time they were separating—and never once made any attempt to communicate with her? Harvey was to get into San Vicente on a certain Saturday night, or he might be delayed till the next Sunday. I rather thought if he did get in, he'd ring me up, yet when Monday came and he hadn't done so, I stopped in at the office and asked.

Yes, he had come. Mr. Bates, in the outer office, motioned me toward the private room and I walked right through as had been my custom. He was at his desk with a big pile of mail in front of him, and he looked up at me with a queer kind of look, then glanced over my shoulder at the door that didn't swing quite shut behind me. I hardly waited to shake hands. I didn't sit down, or say a word to him about his trip, but rushed straight to the point.

"Harvey, I want you to give me——"

Again he looked at the door, so significantly this time that I hesitated. Someone was coming into the outer office. There were noisy greetings. Determined not to be put off or interrupted, I bent down and spoke in a sort of energetic whisper.

"Harvey," I said, "give me Delia's address—now—this morning. I've got to write to her. It's none of my business what—how—how things are between you two. I love Delia. Why would I hold off from her? I'm ashamed that I haven't written before. Where is she? Give me her address."

Without taking his hands off of the work on his desk, he sat, his head twisted around, and stared up at me. Before he could say a word a voice sounded behind me:

"Well—Fornia Boyce—Foncie!"

A stoutish, palish, much-dressed-up woman that I couldn't think I had ever seen before stood in the door of the private office. I gaped at her. It came over me that I must be looking at the Mrs. Harvey Watkins Miss

Chandler had described. Yes, I was right, for the woman came and took me in a business-like embrace and kissed me.

"Mr. Bates said it was you in here. To think of just walking up on you this way—when I haven't seen you for—why, it must be six or seven years!"

"Delia!" I hung on to the lapel of her coat; it seemed to me I never had been so glad to see anybody in my life. The unexpectedness of her return made it only the more welcome. Here was my refuge. Here was the one woman friend I could count on in San Vicente. "Why, Delia," I babbled, "how did you know me—just like that?"

What a speech! The minute the words were out I saw they implied that I'd not have known her—that she was awfully changed. However, it seemed she was just the same as ever in one way—not readily offended. She just kissed me again and laughed.

"Oh, I knew you were in San Vicente, though, of course, I didn't expect to find you here. Mrs. Eccles wrote me she was taking care of a child for you."

"Mrs. Eccles!" I stood there, not daring to so much as glance in Harvey's direction.

"Sure, Mrs. Eccles," Delia repeated. "She always attends to things at the house for me, and when she wrote about them she mentioned you and the child. Harvey never would have thought of it." She had moved over to him. Her hand was on his shoulder; he was looking straight ahead of him. "That's a man for you—writing to me every day of the world, and never mentioned it!"

He had been writing to her every day! I stood positively stupefied, trying to make that fact fit in with any other single thing I knew of the past months. He had been writing to her every day. There they both were in front of me, talking, and I had to answer—this was no time to get it straightened out—*he had been writing to her every day!*

Harvey bunched his letters in his hands, got up and pushed his desk chair around with his knee. He hadn't looked at me yet, but now I gazed hard at him as he glanced toward Delia and spoke—naturally enough, it seemed to me:

"You've forgotten, Dele—I certainly mentioned Calla when she first came down to San Vicente. You've just forgotten."

He went then. I can't say that he seemed embarrassed or distressed, but as I looked after him it was as though the Harvey Watkins I knew had been spirited away and another man put into the good tweed suit. This was Harvey Watkins, the married man—Delia's Harvey. As she shoved in, smiling, to take his desk chair, and pulled me toward the arm of it, facing her, I asked, stammeringly:

"When—when did you get back?"

"Came Saturday—with Harve. Every week-end for a month, when he'd start home, I've been having half a mind to come along; and this time I just did it."

I held my eyes down and fumbled with my fingers, and thought what an idiot I'd been never to guess where Harvey's week-ends were spent. Delia noticed nothing. She was going on in her good-natured, practical, chatty way:

"And I'm glad I came, too. I can get as good electric treatment right here in San Vicente as I was getting at the sanitarium, and the way they feed you at Mount Pleasant is a disgrace. Give me my own house and my own cook."

"You—— I raised my eyes with what I meant to be a smile. "You've got such a lovely home——"

"Oh, you've seen it?" she interrupted. "Of course—going out to Las Reudas where the child is. But wait till I show you my things. We'll have some good times there—won't we?"

I nodded, clawing desperately at the idea of telling her

how often I had been in her house. Then I heard myself say:

"I'm attending business college now, but—but of course I'll be glad to come and see you when I'm out at Las Reudas some time."

"Business college!" Delia picked up my jacket edge, her eyes on my face. "Say, Foncie, have you left your husband?"

"Yes."

She pulled a bit, unconsciously, on the coat hem, and squinted up her eyes.

"Uh-huh," she nodded. "Mrs. Eccles said she thought you had. Are you getting a divorce?"

"Yes. Harvey got it for me—the interlocutory decree—just before he left on this trip."

"Well, did you ever! Aren't men funny?" She let go of me and sat back to laugh. "They never think to tell you the gossip. Of course, Harvey and I were on the go every minute with the bar association this time; but—a divorce—poor Foncie! 'Change the name and not the letter, change for the worse and not for the better.' I'm awfully sorry. Was—was he mean to you?"

"No—yes—I—not now, Delia," I halted out.

"All right—all right," Delia agreed, hastily. "But, Foncie—any alimony?"

"No. That's why I'm studying stenography. Harvey thought it was the best plan. He got the firm to promise me a position here."

"Here?" screamed Delia, then laughed heartily. "Isn't that just like Hoddy? He couldn't think of any other place for you, so he let them stick you in here. Goodness, that'll never do! We'll have to think up something better for you, Foncie."

"But I've—they advanced money for my course in the business college," I said. "I'm to pay it back out of my salary."

"Well—can't you pay it back out of a salary you get from some other firm just as well?" demanded practical Delia. "These folks'll never give you what you ought to have—with a child to support. You let me manage it. Hoddy's a fine lawyer, and a kind old dear, but he's of no account for a thing of this sort. I'm twice as good a mixer." She looked me over thoughtfully, patting my shoulder. "I'll tell you what I'd do if I were in your place. I'd try for a position on the 'Clarion.' You used to write splendidly. You were sending articles to the San Vicente 'Clarion' when I visited in Stanleyton."

Quite true. The clippings of those first attempts which had actually been printed on a Woman's Page seven years ago were among my things at the Poinsettia now, saved along with other valuable documents in a pasteboard box. I would have said there was no one left in the world to remember them; it warmed my heart to Delia that she should sit there and seriously recall them as of value, and I cried out, almost as I might have done in the days when those things were written:

"If I only could get a place like that!"

"Well—there's no reason you shouldn't try," Delia encouraged. "Fix up nice, put on the prettiest dress you've got, and go and ask. Just stick to it. Don't let them say 'No' to you. Tell them you're an intimate friend of mine—that I'll swing all the women's associations in town for you. You've got to make every edge cut, Fonceie—a divorced woman, burdened with a child—poor girl!"

Harvey was coming back. He stopped in the doorway when he saw that Delia had his chair.

"All right," she said, getting to her feet and collecting shopping bag, boa, gloves and veil, "I'll go. We can finish our visit out home. Fonceie's coming to dinner this evening, so don't you fail to be on time, Hod—five o'clock, because you've got a lot of watering to do on that front yard——"

"Oh, Delia," I interrupted. "Really I don't believe I could come this evening."

"Of course you can." Delia freed a hand and took hold of me. "I'm just dying to show you my house. You get there by five o'clock—half past—six, anyhow—and we'll have a real old-fashioned visit."

"I've seen your house—it's lovely," I was beginning, hurriedly. But Delia wasn't listening. She brushed me aside with:

"Foncie, don't bring the little one with you this evening. I want to have a nice long visit—just with you. It can come some other time."

While she said all this I couldn't see a flicker of change on Harvey's wooden face where he stood by the door, the knob in his hand, ready to let her out. When she got opposite him she halted, picking at an imaginary thread on his coat, looking him over with a connubial intimacy that would have been disconcerting to any outsider, but which, under the circumstances, made my head go around. I knew of old that what one got from Delia was always plain facts. If there had been any real trouble between her and Harvey she could no more have concealed it from me than she could have written stories or acted on the stage. It wasn't merely that she meant to be frank—she lacked imagination to be anything else. Delia had made the kind of wife who cannot keep her hands off her husband, before folks. She looked from him to me, from me to him, and finally said, complacently:

"He's a pretty good old man, Foncie. But you have to keep any of 'em busy. Make 'em useful, or they'll forget you're alive—won't they?"

"All right, Dele—give me your list." Harvey jiggled the door a little, but his tone was the amiable commonplace of a satisfactorily married husband.

"There," crowed Delia, triumphantly; "haven't I got him well trained?" Then, to Harvey, "You only need to

go past the electrical company's place and bring out my vibrator. Just one errand—but you'd better not forget that!" She turned again to me. "Half past five, honey—and don't bring the child."

Harvey got a parting pull and pat. Delia looked over her shoulder to nod once more brightly to me. Then he shut the door behind her. We were alone together. He came across to his desk. He didn't look at me. I tried to think of something to say—and couldn't get one word. What was the use? There he stood, just Harvey Watkins. And, after all, he hadn't actually lied to me in words anywhere. He had just implied everything, and let me deceive myself. No, there was no use talking to him about it; all I could do was to go ahead and be frank and honest with Delia now.

"Well, Calla," as Harvey got into his chair, he sent a sort of dodging glance at me and attempted to take up our conversation where it had been interrupted, "weren't you asking me for something when she came in?"

I laughed a little.

"Yes," I said; "for Delia's address. But I've got it."

"All right." Harvey refused to see the joke. "What else?"

"I wanted to return the scholarship card," laying it on his desk. "I'm done with it."

"Ready for work, do you mean?" He looked up, startled. "Can you begin now? I wouldn't have taken that stuff out to Bates if I had known that."

I stood before him, mute as a fish. What in the world should I say? I couldn't work for McBride, McBride & Watkins now, and meet Harvey every day—let alone hold the position of his private secretary—yet there was the bargain. I'd had the money.

"Well?" he prompted, impatiently.

"Delia and I were talking——" I began, and broke off. The stupid silence that followed made me mad—why

should *I* have to feel all the embarrassment? Before I knew it I had blurted out, "I'm going down to the 'Clarion' office and ask for a job there."

"The 'Clarion'?" Harvey swung around and stared. "Who put that fool notion in your head?"

"Delia——" I began, but he broke out:

"Well, I'll be darned! If you leave two women alone for a minute they can hatch up more mischief. Take this week off if you like—on salary—and go to work here next Monday morning. You let the 'Clarion' office alone—it's no place for you."

"What's the matter? Don't you believe I can write well enough to work on a newspaper?" I asked, resentfully, and added, "Mr. Dale thinks I have good writing ability."

"He does?" For a minute Harvey had a notion to quarrel with me about Frank Hollis Dale. I could see it in his eye. Then he went back to the first question. I rather had him there, because he wouldn't say a word openly and directly against Delia's advice. "That's not the point," he shook his head. "Even if I should let you throw up your bargain with this firm (mind, I'm not doing anything of the sort; you're going to work for us as you're in honour bound), it wouldn't be to see you go after a place that would cost any woman her reputation. Everybody knows what Stokes is. He doesn't let any of 'em get by. You keep out of his office."

Yesterday Harvey's talk about my having made a contract with his firm would have silenced me; yesterday what he said about the editor of the "Clarion" would have weighed with me; but after this morning I thought I was doing pretty well to only say to him:

"Yes. Well, I guess I'll take Delia's advice this time, Harvey. She thinks the 'Clarion' office is all right—and you were just making a place for me here out of good nature. I can pay you back with what I earn there, and I'll do it."

Harvey exploded, but inarticulately. I left him furious; yet I think he got off easy.

I did exactly as Delia had told me—went home and put on my best; made myself look as nice as possible; and was downtown again while my courage still held. A frowsy old flight of steps led up to the “Clarion” office. The newspaper had the entire second floor. I could see when I got to the head of the stairs, through little dingy corridors and open doors in every direction, people moving about, work going on. I asked a dirty-faced boy who came flying past with his hands full of manuscript where Mr. Stokes’s room was. He jerked a thumb over his shoulder toward the door he had come out of, mumbled something, and I went ahead, scared to death.

I got my first view of my editor sitting at his desk. I rapped again on the open door; he paid no attention; of course he wouldn’t, with all the clatter of the presses and machines on that floor. I stood and stared at him and trembled—a big, loosely made, bearish-looking man, working away like smoke at galley proofs. I went in and stood directly across from him. I had my name ready written on a card. After a while I got up courage to reach out and put it on the table beside his work. He glanced at it, looked up at me without seeming to see me, and mumbled:

“Whadd’ye want?”

“A job.”

“What kind?”

“Why—writing. I wrote these for the ‘Clarion.’” I spread out my little bale of clippings, my faith in them not quite so strong as it had been when I put them in my purse.

He reached a great, hairy paw across, swept the bits of print into the circle of his gaze, and looked them over. Then he raised his eyes to me, apparently seeing me for the first time.

“You wrote these for the ‘Clarion’? When? Good

Lord!" as he glanced down and caught sight of a date line on one of them which included the year. "These things are seven years old—outlawed!" He thumped them with a sort of grunt. "Haven't you any better reason than that for expecting to get a job on a newspaper?"

"Yes," I answered; "you're going to give me the job because you can see by looking at me that I'm a good worker, and I'll obey orders. You're going to give me a chance."

Up to this time everything Mr. Stokes did or said was in the line of getting rid of me. Now he threw himself back in his chair for a long survey.

"Sit down," he ordered.

I dropped into the chair instantly. His eyes never left me. I felt the blood come into my face, because as soon as I sat down, his foot touched mine under the table. I would have thought myself prudish to notice this but for what Harvey had said.

"What have you been doing since you wrote these things?" the editor of the "Clarion" opened up his investigation. "Are you sure you did write 'em? You look to me like a high school girl. I can't see you writing for the papers seven years ago."

"I was in high school then," I said. "I had no assistance on the work except one—one friend, who criticised them for me."

I sat looking down, suddenly overwhelmed—it was Philip who had listened, commented, praised.

"Huh—so you wrote these things seven years ago—with somebody to help you—and you'll walk in here to my office and expect me to turn a perfectly good society editor out of her place and give it to you—is that it?"

It descended on me like a load of brick. He hadn't intended to do anything but refuse. I jumped up hastily, afraid I should cry, he had managed to make it so disappointing and humiliating.

"I didn't know but you had a place vacant," I got out, with fair composure. "I need the work. I have a child to support—and——"

I turned my back and fairly ran. Mr. Stokes's voice stopped me at the door.

"Hold on!" he bellowed after me. "Come back here; I want to take another look at you."

He swung around in his desk chair, a big bulk of a man, pompous, overbearing, but not, so far as I could see, dangerous in any way. I went meekly and stood before him like a child while he put me through a catechism.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"Married?"

"Divorced. My little boy is four years old. I have him and myself to support."

"Four years old!" Mr. Stokes worried the big, black cigar he had stuck in the corner of his mouth and surveyed my points at leisure. Now that he had begun to look at me, he scarcely glanced away at all. I didn't mind his staring very much. I felt toward him a good deal as you do toward a big, shaggy dog that you aren't really afraid of. "Four years old!" he repeated. "Married before you were seventeen, huh?"

I nodded.

"Where did you live? What does your husband do?"

"At Meaghers, Oregon. A small dairy ranch."

"I see. A job on the 'Clarion' is likely to be easier than the dairy, huh?"

Again I nodded. Let him think what he would. All I wanted from Mr. Stokes was a job; so long as there was any chance of my getting that, I certainly would not offend him, or admit myself offended by him.

"Is there—have you got anything for me to do—anything?" I asked.

"We-ell," his glance left me slowly and travelled around

the room, "I guess I'll let you go now, Sis. Come back to-morrow—late—I'm busy up till five o'clock. You come in after five—and I'll see what I can do for you."

I thanked him and went. He was back at his proofs before I had crossed the room. I hadn't got the promise of any job, but as I descended the stairs my spirits were good. I had confidence in my ability to "manage" the editor.

I went straight from the "Clarion" office to Las Reudas and found Boy in a furious tantrum. My son stood in the middle of the little garden at Mrs. Eccles's, his hazel eyes black with rage, his cheeks burning red, his yellow hair tousled by dirty, clutching hands. He had thrown bud'n down and was kicking it, shouting:

"I won't have it—old, ugly thing! Muvver," he ran to me as I came in and laid hold of my skirts, "I want my Fairy doggie. Bring it—quick."

"It isn't your doggie, Boy," I reasoned with him gently. "Fairy belongs to Mrs. Watkins."

"*Is my doggie!*" He delivered a blow on my thigh which may have been intended for emphasis, but seemed more like chastisement.

"No, it's Mrs. Watkins's doggie," I persisted. "Mrs. Watkins hasn't seen Fairy for a long, long time. She's been way. She's been sick, honey boy. Aren't you sorry she was sick? Poor Mrs. Watkins!"

"No. She can't have my Fairy doggie." Then, with a sudden crafty eye cast up toward me, "I'll give her bud'n. I don't want bud'n. She can have him. I want my doggie." And again the sobs shook him; once more he mauled the unoffending bud'n for not being what it was never intended to be.

We had a great time over him, and I liked Mrs. Eccles better than I ever had done. He hit us both, and she didn't stand out for her first proposition that he should be made to apologise. I told her he'd do that next day

without any making. I'd never seen his will broken, though I'd had to interfere when his father tried with a collection of eucalyptus switches to accomplish that undesirable thing. I was desperately eager to get to Delia's—I did wish I could be there before Harvey came from town, so as to have a minute alone with her and set things right. They weren't really wrong, but concealment would make them seem so—and there was nothing to conceal. Boyce roared and charged till he wore himself out; at last we got him, snuffing, into bed, I promising to ask if Fairy couldn't come over and see him the next day.

"Not see me," was his last, whimpering protest as his eyes were going shut. "Come be my own doggie. *Is* my own doggie." And he slept.

I was late. I found the Watkinses on the lawn, Harvey with the hose, being told just what to do with it, like a true suburban husband and householder. Poor Boy's own doggie lay on the porch and snored, till my step roused her and she waddled out toward me yapping.

"She won't bite," Delia called, coming down the walk. "Poor old Fairy, she hasn't got enough teeth left." She reached me and put an arm around me in schoolgirl fashion, grumbling, "I believe a pet dog's a worse bother than a child. Children do grow up and get out of the way sometimes, but even when a spaniel's old and too fat and half-blind and cross, you don't quite feel like having it chloroformed or giving it away."

Harvey had nodded to me as I came in and gone on with his work, but now we were within earshot, and I said, rather at him:

"I've just come from somebody who doesn't think Fairy's old or fat. Boyce cried himself to sleep this evening for her. Won't you please let her go over and play with him to-morrow?"

"He'd better come here," Harvey spoke up quickly, and Delia added, doubtfully:

"I suppose he might. We'll be all torn up to-morrow anyhow, having the rugs out. A child around won't make so much difference. Yes—he'd better come. I can keep an eye on him then. Fairy's a spoiled baby herself. Children never understand getting along with animals."

She had no more notion of the feeling between Boy and her dog than she had of the footing that Harvey and I had been on. No imagination helped her to guess what might have been taking place while she was away. She seemed to suppose we had all been standing on the shelf waiting for her to come home and take us down and dust us and place us in our proper relation to each other.

"Hoddy," she said suddenly, "before I go in I want to see you watering those lilies. I'm crazy to show Foncie the house, but I won't leave till I see you start on them. They need a lot. You never did give them enough. I believe you've got a spite at them."

"I've seen the house inside," I began hurriedly, determined that the mere statement of facts should not be lacking. Delia ran to take the hose out of Harvey's hand and regulate the spray.

"He's been mad about these callas ever since I planted them here," she cried, half laughing, half angry. "He says they're too common in California—that they look like scraps of dirty white paper somebody's thrown out of the window."

Why is a woman concerned and embarrassed at such a time? The man in the case wasn't.

"Aw, you've got that wrong, Dele," he said over his shoulder, hosing away at the callas. "I always claimed these for mine. I wanted them around under the window of my den."

"Was that it?" asked Delia carelessly. "I knew you'd fought about having them planted in that particular bed. But they're a flower that I love."

I was glad to follow into the house. Delia hardly let me

get my hat off before she hurried me down the back hall, pulled open the door of the kitchen and was for going in.

The range was covered with simmering, steaming sauce-pans; an odor of cooking came out to us; a Chinaman in blue cotton jacket stopped our way, demanding,

"What you want?"

"Now, Wo Far—" My heart jumped at the name. "—I only want to show Mrs. Baird your lovely kitchen. Just a minute. We won't disturb you. You keep it so clean I'm proud to show it."

The Chinaman stood back and regarded us with a half derisive eye. Certainly he couldn't have failed to recognise me.

"Missy Baird," he echoed. "Name Missy Baird?"

"Yes, my friend Mrs. Baird. Look at the range, Foncie, it's wrought steel and has all the very latest tricks to it. It cost——"

"She you flend?" Wo Far laughed a little, and my cheeks were hot. "I think she see plenty kitchen—you go now—I cook dinner."

"Oh, but she's never seen *my* kitchen before," Delia coaxed. "I wanted her to see my kitchen once. There—we'll go."

We went. The Chinaman looked after us chuckling, and repeating, "Never see you kitchen! Now she see you kitchen!" I would have explained to Delia then and there, but she began to talk and fairly headed me off.

"Wo Far's always like that," she said. "Chinese cooks never want you to go into the kitchen, but I put up with Wo because he's the best I ever had, and he's been with me so long. Come up to my room and let me show you the sleeping-porch. You'll never know true comfort till you sleep out of doors, Foncie."

It was Wo Far who put the crowning touch on my discomfort that day. It seemed to me I had made an honest effort to have Delia understand the intimate knowl-

edge I had had of her home, and how things had been going on. It couldn't be done; there was too much of Harvey's tacit deceit to explain. By the time we got to the dinner table I fully realised that there was no use trying. If it hadn't been for the Chinaman then, the meal would not have been such a misery. Really nothing had happened that amounted to a row of pins, yet whenever Wo Far changed my plate or asked Delia a question, I had a feeling of guilt. I was glad when Delia finally asked me,

"Well, did you go to the 'Clarion' office?"

"Yes," I nodded, "and made an appointment for tomorrow afternoon. I believe I'm going to get some sort of a place there."

"All right for you," Harvey was helping my plate a second time to lamb and mint sauce as he spoke, "but you needn't say I didn't warn you."

"I haven't got the place yet," I said, laughing nervously.

"What's that?" asked Delia, adding mashed potato as my plate passed her. "Didn't Hoddy want you to try the 'Clarion'?"

"Well—rather not!" There was a gleam in Harvey's eye as he glanced across the table. "She went up to Phipps's to fit herself for a place in my office. Then when she's ready for it you get at her and persuade her to rush out and hunt another job. Who would like it?"

"Now, Harve—you haven't got a place for Fonce in your office."

"I need a private secretary bad enough," sullenly.

"Well, she can't afford to work for 'thank you.' There's no future in your place. Fonce'll make a name for herself in newspaper work."

"She'll make a name for herself working in the same office with Bill Stokes," Harvey laughed shortly. "But it won't be the right kind of name."

"Now, Harve, just because you've got a high standard,

and live up to it yourself, it doesn't do to condemn people right and left, that fall a little below it. I know what you mean—but I don't see it the way you do. I know there are stories about Mr. Stokes, but that's just what I think they are—stories. I've met him several times at club receptions—his wife belongs to the Laurel Wreath and the Whist Circle, and I must say he always treated me as a gentleman should. What did you think of him this afternoon, Fonceie?"

"I didn't think of him at all," I said untruthfully. "I was so busy trying to get a job out of him that I hadn't any time to."

"There—you see," Delia nodded across at Harvey triumphantly, "Fonceie's not the little schoolgirl flirt she was when you knew her back in Stanleyton. Poor thing—she's had trouble, and it's made a woman of her. She could go anywhere and get along with anybody—now."

"Well—if she 'gets along' with Bill Stokes, it'll certainly be the worse for her. He's notorious. He takes 'em as they come. He's after 'em all. And there's not a ghost of a chance for advancement in that office. Stokes wouldn't have it. He'd be jealous of anyone that showed ability. He'd get 'em fired from his dirty rag of a paper. I think you might at least have spoken to me before you put her up to going down there for work."

I made some sort of hasty interruption, and got the talk diverted to something else for the moment, but we quarrelled off and on about that miserable business all evening. No topic could be started up that didn't get around to it finally. Boyce was the only subject that disputed the centre of the stage with it; when Harvey turned in to talk to Delia about him, I didn't know which way to look. They both got mad, and spoke more plainly than they had any business to before a third person. You would have thought there never had been such a child born into the world as

that son of mine. I'm foolish about him myself, but Harvey, trying to make Delia feel bad, raved about him beyond all common sense and reason. And poor Delia, almost crying, talked about her health and went into details on the subject of her operations. I could see it was the one point that Harvey let himself go on and got the best of her about—children—their childless home. He felt he had a genuine grievance there, and either she agreed with him or else she knew that all the rest of the world would and was readier to make concessions.

Altogether it was a pretty stormy session, and it didn't make me feel that I wanted to go back there very soon. The question of my working for Harvey or getting the place on the paper was not brought up again till just as I was leaving. We had got as far as the hall, Delia called, "Wait a minute," and dived into the hall closet for something. Harvey seized the chance to ask in a whisper:

"Was it true—what you said at the table—about not having closed the trade with that dirty dog till to-morrow afternoon?"

I nodded.

"All right. I'll see you again before that time. I'll talk you out of it. I'll show you why——"

I shook my head sharply. He took hold of my arm and pulled me toward the front door, speaking hastily over his shoulder.

"Dele—I'll take Calla to her car."

"Of course." Delia got the scarf she was after, and emerged, putting it on. "We'll all take her. Come on, Fairy."

The three of us walked almost in silence to the corner where the car stopped. When we saw its lights a block down, Delia kissed me, urging,

"Now, Foncie, come out here to see me all you can. I

know it's hard in a strange town, this way. You just count Harve and me your own folks."

The car was near. Harvey came to help me on.

"Kiss her good-bye, too—why don't you, Hoddy?" Delia demanded. "Poor, lonesome girl—I don't mind—kiss her."

CHAPTER XI

A WOMAN'S JOB

I ever a human being felt silly it was I, getting on the car, starting back to town, Delia waving after me, then turning to lead her husband away by the arm! Silly, and mad, too.

One thing certain—I'd have that work on the "Clarion" now even if Stokes was all that Harvey said. I would make it answer for a few weeks, anyhow, till I could get something else. The more I thought over my first interview with Mr. Stokes the more I believed this possible. And at five o'clock the next afternoon, having tucked a spray of honeysuckle in my brown belt, I went groping up those dark stairs without much concern as to the hour of my appointment, or the wording of it.

The whole second floor was silent and apparently empty as I stopped in the upper hall, getting my first chill from the sight of open doors and vacant rooms in every direction. If Mr. Stokes had remembered the hour he set, and was there, he must be the only soul in the place. Had I mistaken the time? Or was I possibly late? I pulled out the thin, old-fashioned gold watch I carried—my father's—and managed there in the dim light to see the hands. It was exactly five o'clock. Straight ahead of me was Mr. Stokes's door, the only closed one in sight. I went and knocked on it. Somebody inside got up, I heard a heavy step; the knob turned, and there he stood.

"Well—you did come back," he said as though he had hardly expected it, led the way in and over toward his table, left me there staring while, without explanation, he tramped across to the big front windows and pulled down the shades. For a moment the room was almost dark, but

as he returned he snapped on the lights, and still without looking at me or saying anything, went back to the door and turned the key in it!

I can hear yet the click of that key as it shot the bolt. I don't know what I expected, but it certainly was not to have him come and roll into his own chair, motioning at the same time toward that one whose back I was gripping with rigid fingers, and say querulously,

"Sit down—sit down!"

I dropped into the chair, weak with relief in spite of the locked door and the lowered shades. His manner was commonplace; I should have been more relieved by it if I had not felt a pressure against my boot toe.

"Just a minute," he said, sorting, numbering, packing up some sheets of paper on his desk.

I moved my feet, but it wasn't any use—I couldn't get them anywhere that his did not eventually follow and find them. Presently he finished, pushed away the copy, tipped back in his chair like a performing elephant and stared at me.

"Are you figuring on a writing job here?" he asked. Then, without giving me time to reply, "You're not going to get it. Nothing doing, Sis."

"Well," I took him up, "what are you going to offer me? You didn't tell me to come here and listen to you say that there was no place for me. You could have said that yesterday. You could have told me over the telephone. What are you going to give me?"

He chuckled and rolled his head on his big shoulders.

"Now don't you get in a hurry," he warned. "You won't like it when you hear about it. We need a roustabout in the office—someone to look after the cuts and clippings and wait on me—fetch and carry. A sort of office girl. If you could do shorthand——"

"I can," I interrupted.

"Why didn't you say so before?"

"Because you never gave me a chance. I'm just through the Phipps Business College. I——"

"A beginner," he cheapened my attainments. "Well, I reckon you can take some letters for me, and—um—maybe I'll try you out at reporting. I might have you along now and then on an interview. Maybe—I'll see about that."

"The pay——" I was beginning when he cut me short.

"Nine dollars a week. Big pay for what you've got to do. You'll only be responsible for the cuts and clippings in the library, keep the run of them so that you can dig up anything that I or Mr. Mears or the reporters ask for at a minute's notice; you'll have plenty of spare time for all the stenography I need, and you'll be ready to do anything else that's asked of you—roustabout—roustabout's what we call it."

His chair thumped down to the floor; his foot met mine with a stronger pressure. It was up to me. I looked at the big, powerful animal, with his bull neck, his thick hands, the sensual mouth. I felt the secure atmosphere of mastery that enveloped him. Every nerve grew still. Could I take the job? Could I cope with this man? My voice, speaking, startled me:

"Can I go to work in the morning?" was what I said.

He didn't answer. He was staring at my gloved hands as they lay in my lap. He reached forward and picked one of them up, holding it a moment looking down at it. Suddenly he caught the wrist of the glove and stripped back the kid.

"Huh—not much of a hand," he said in a queer, husky tone. "Not much of a hand to earn a living with."

It did look small and very white against his big, brown, primitive paw. I didn't pull away, but got to my feet instantly; he held on and kept looking at the bare hand as he had looked at the glove. My wedding ring seemed to catch his attention, for he touched it with a blunt fore-

finger, appeared as though he would speak of it, then, with an odd jerking up of his head, which tossed back the great thatch of hair from his forehead, patted the hand a little with a curious naïveté, and dropped it.

I went quickly to the door. He trundled unconcernedly after, reached past me and unlocked it to let me out, remarking,

“Got to turn a key here in this office if you don’t want everybody to know your business—before you know it yourself.”

Was it going to be possible to hold this job? The question seemed a pressing one when I went down to the “Clarion” office next day; it grew less pressing as the practical aspects of the mere work demanded pretty nearly all of my attention. Mr. Stokes gave me enough for two people to do. He was a hard driver, but not on that account disagreeable to work for, and he was certainly an able editor. The other girls and women employed about the establishment got along with him the best they could, and according to what they were. When their positions didn’t depend on him, some of them flared up. The red-headed forewoman in the bindery was a tartar.

“You’re not my boss,” I heard her saying to him one morning—and she went into his own office to say it, too. “You keep out of my department, Mr. Stokes. Let me alone, and let the girls that work there alone.”

I didn’t know what he’d done, but he just laughed at her. He didn’t seem to mind my hearing, either. He knew he was a town scandal and rather liked it.

As for me, I was among those he hired and fired. I had to get along with him or leave. So did more than one woman reporter during the time I stayed there. I don’t think I could have stuck it out even the first week, if it hadn’t been for Miss Bailey, who was the assistant editor, and Mrs. Stokes’s sister. Her desk was in Mr. Stokes’s room. She did all the editorial work that he did not cover;



"HUH—NOT MUCH OF A HAND," HE SAID IN A QUEER, HUSKY TONE. "NOT MUCH OF A HAND TO EARN A LIVING WITH"



society, book reviews, exchanges, and licking into shape the work of the reporters—a sulky, dissatisfied, incompetent cub of a boy, and some hard-faced, objectionable-looking girls. As to these latter, it was none of my business; I didn't set up to judge them—I tried not to know—but I couldn't help seeing that all the favours, and any good chance, went to someone whom Mr. Stokes could describe as “a sensible little woman,” or “a good friend of mine.” There was a continual coming and going among these folks; Miss Bailey used to fairly curse over their miserable copy. Occasionally she'd get one of them discharged that way. But Mr. Stokes wouldn't give me any real newspaper work; I soon saw that.

Miss Bailey—Rosalie, and the name was sort of pathetic for her—had a withered left arm. That entire side was slightly paralysed, and had been from birth, so that the helpless hand was smaller than her other, that side of her face affected, and she spoke rather indistinctly. She might have been handsome if it hadn't been for this affliction. It was touching to see her so brave and active, managing her work with queer deftness, giving that little swinging hand things to hold, putting its glove on it with the help of her teeth. Pessimistic, yet with a sort of hardy good spirits, she treated her Editor, to whom she spoke as little as she possibly could, with brief, dry contempt.

My work was mostly in a sort of lumber room that they called the library, dirty, full of books, files, cuts and clippings. My typewriter stood in a little cubby off the place where the reporters worked. I acquired the knack of keeping myself out of reach when I was in Mr. Stokes's room, had the door open as much as possible, and did his personal work largely when Miss Bailey was in. Always overworked, she would have drawn me into her department if he had not been determinedly against it. Yet she did ask me to get some society items for her from Miss Chandler.

"Got a place on the 'Clarion'?" said Eugenia when I went to her for them. She studied me a minute. "Well, newspaper work isn't so bad. I'm sure I wish you luck," and she gave me the items I'd asked for. My work on the "Clarion" brought me in contact with her more than once after that, and she never so long as I held my job made any reference to what had earlier been said between us.

When I asked Mr. Dale what he thought about the new position, he said it seemed a pretty good idea if I could get any chance at what the cubs were doing—police court reporting, fires and murders—stuff with life in it—and death—outside of Rosalie's division.

Delia had a sort of comfortable automatic fashion of scolding me for not coming to see her more, and once or twice made an appointment to take me to a matinee or an interesting club meeting in the afternoon. I explained to her that I was keeping up some of my outside work, and that I was pretty tired most of the time when I was out of the office. Sundays and evenings when Harvey was there, I would not go, but I always did run over for a few minutes at other times when I was out to Mrs. Eccles's.

I didn't care what Harvey thought about it, but one day when I met him on the street he put himself squarely in my way and stopped me with:

"Well, still at the 'Clarion' office?"

"Yes," I answered, "and I'm due there right now."

He turned and caught step with me, eyeing me sidewise, getting ready, I could see, to quarrel. I didn't help him to begin, and we were pretty nearly to the office when he said,

"Calla—how does Bill Stokes treat you?"

"Like a father." I looked squarely up at Harvey, and he certainly was mad.

"Like the devil!" he retorted. "Here—hold on," for we had reached the foot of the outside stairs, and I was about to go up without another word.

"Well?" I waited impatiently.

"Why don't you ever drop in at the Cronin Building—like you used to?" he asked.

"I went there on business, Harvey," I said with a little spurt of temper. "At present I haven't got any business there—so I don't go. And now while we're speaking about it, let me say that you've made it so that I don't feel like visiting at your house, either. I hate that, because Delia and I are old friends, and——"

But Harvey had walked on. He wasn't going to listen to anything like that. Up to this time he had never been in the "Clarion" office since I was there. Miss Bailey said the firm had quarrelled with the "Clarion" management, but now this appeared to be patched up, for he began coming there frequently, and would be out and in most any time.

One afternoon when I was working in the office alone the 'phone rang, and when I answered I got Harvey's voice over the wire asking if Mr. Stokes was in.

"No," I said, trying to make my voice different; "but if you'll leave your number I'll have him call you up."

"Who is there?" I could get the agitation in Harvey's tones even through the telephone. "Calla—are you alone?" I didn't answer, and he spoke again, "Calla—it is you, isn't it?"

"What number did you say? I'll have Mr. Stokes call you up when he comes in," I repeated.

"You can't fool me, honey," I knew that Harvey was bending close to the receiver, almost whispering into it. "Calla—why don't you ever come in to see me in the evenings like you used to? I want to take you out for a little spin in the car. We could go——"

"What number——?"

"Come this evening"

"No."

"To-morrow, then."

"No. I'll tell Mr. Stokes you rang him up."

"Calla——"

I hung up the 'phone.

That was the last I saw or heard of him. Month followed month till three of them had passed. I was working so hard that I had almost forgotten everything outside when one day I heard a familiar voice in Mr. Stokes's room, and then somebody came to the door and looked into the cubby-hole where my machine stood. It was Harvey. He stopped there and spoke rather loud, since I was using the typewriter.

"How do you do, Mrs. Baird—how goes the work?"

"Pretty well, thank you," I answered both questions.

I went on with my typing, and he seemed quite set back. Finally he came in and stood very close, looking down at my hands.

"Please—Calla," he whispered.

"Please what?"

"You know what I want well enough."

"I don't," without looking up from my machine.

"Just a little visit with you—the car—five o'clock—please, Calla!"

"No," I said explosively, and looked straight into Miss Bailey's face where she stood in the door behind Harvey, grinning.

"Cal," she drawled with that queer little blur on her words, "pitch the man out. I want to come in. There ain't room for three of us in here."

She had some copying to give me, and Harvey left. As he went she looked after him.

"All alike—ain't they?" she said. Then, in a more hopeful tone, as she faced the hooks behind the door where my hat and jacket hung, "Where you catch'em lid? Hats ain't all alike, and that's a cinch."

She was edging up to my new straw sailor, swinging her

good side around so as to be able to get it down for closer inspection.

"The basement at Snow's—paid two bits for it, and put the band and quill on for myself," I said.

"I—call—that—*chick!*" She turned it slowly round on her doubled fist. "Cal, you've sure got the touch." She tilted her head on one side and narrowed her eyes. "Darned if you haven't made the thing look like you, too. I'd know that lid for yours, if I met it in Hong Kong."

CHAPTER XII

ADVICE

BOY thrived. He was such a robust, turbulent little chap—I wished he might have playmates. But if he wanted a romp with Fairy, even, he had to go over to Delia's, and Mrs. Eccles grumbled because he was there so much. I went out unexpectedly once, late in the afternoon, and found her alone.

“Over at Mrs. Watkins's,” she sort of sniffed, when I asked for Boy. “Mrs. Watkins has got the idea that it pleases her husband to have Jawn about. He wouldn't go all the time if she didn't coax him.”

“Well, I'm glad they're so fond of him,” I tried to smooth matters.

“You may be pleased,” she said rather sourly, “but it's not good for the child. Mrs. Watkins doesn't know a thing in the world about the care of them. I had Jawn all systematised, and they let him eat any time of day, and feed him things no child should have.”

“I'll run over there and see him,” I said.

“Send him right back home,” Mrs. Eccles called after me as I was leaving. “I'm making waists for him out of some old white linen dresses of Mrs. Watkins's. I want him to try on.”

I found Boyce playing with the dog in the back yard at the Watkins house, tearing around looking mighty handsome in a beautiful waist—no doubt the first of the made-overs from Delia's frocks. He seemed very appropriate in that place of watered flowers, shaven sod and trim brick walls, like a little prince. As he ran toward me whooping, Wo Far came to the kitchen door with a little cake he had baked for my son. I had a guilty feeling that Mrs. Eccles

might frown upon me for not interfering, but I thanked the Chinaman myself as I started to lead Boyce away. We were just getting around the side of the house when Delia popped her head out of an upstairs window, her hair all down, a curler in her hand, crying,

"Did I hear Fonce down there?"

"Yes," I answered, "Mrs. Eccles wants Boy. I'll be back in a minute."

"Come and sit with me while I dress," Delia called as the child and I rushed away.

I saw Boy past the only street he would have to cross, and turned back to Delia, going in through the entry and up the back stairs to her room. I found her with evening clothes laid out on the bed, herself dressed as to her skirts and feet, a kimono drawn over her corset cover and bare arms, sitting at the dressing table doing her hair.

"It's a dirty shame I can't ask you to stay for dinner," she said, reaching up to kiss me, the lock she was placing still in her fingers. "Tell you what, Fonce, you come Sunday after next. We're out ourselves next Sunday. Bring Jack; Wo Far makes us eat at two o'clock, Sundays."

"All right," I said; "and Boy will love it."

"Wish you'd let me know beforehand that you'd be out here to-day—I'd have had you this evening. But Harve 'phoned a while ago for me to come in and have dinner with him and go to see 'The Blue Bird.' Would you like to go with us? I expect he could get another ticket."

"No," I said positively; I had looked a good while at a four-bit piece that would have let me into the gallery, and decided that I could spare neither it nor the hours of sleep. "No, Delia—don't ask him. I heard before I left town that the house was all sold out."

"Is it?" Delia returned to her hairdressing with renewed energy, and spoke part of the time with hairpins in

her mouth. "Harve's crazy about it. He got the book for Jack—wanted to take him to see the play, too. Mrs. Eccles put her foot down on that. Of course the child couldn't stay awake." She got up and shook her skirts. "I suppose now you're on the paper you don't see much of Mr. Dale any more?" She began to get into the theatre waist that I was to hook up.

"About as much as ever," I replied. "I do his work after I come back at night. Why?"

Delia laughed self-consciously, and even her good, honest face put on that curious, sickly, silly expression that I had seen on the faces of so many women when they spoke of or to Frank Hollis Dale. No wonder that he rather despised the sex if this was the way he generally saw them!

"The Laurel Wreath wants to give him a reception while the State Federation's here," Delia explained.

"When will it be?" I asked.

"Next month—the Federation; but I don't know that the reception will be at all," Delia said plaintively. "Mrs. Ballinger went with a committee of invitation to see if they couldn't make sure of him—and he put them off. They had to see him at the college, because of that ironclad rule of no visitors at the bungalow. Oh, Foncie, you don't know how many women here in San Vicente would give their eye teeth to have the privilege that you get paid for! Don't laugh—they would."

"I can't help laughing," I said. "Besides, I don't get paid for it."

"Foncie!"

"Well, I started doing practice work for Mr. Dale, and I guess he's forgotten that I'm out of school now and might expect to be earning something."

"Is he mean about money?"

"He's—well, your friends have to have their little failings, and——"

"Think of being able to call such a man as that your

friend! Delia broke in. "Foncie—do you believe you could get him to come to the Laurel Wreath reception? Will you try? I'd do anything on earth for you."

"You've done a great deal for me, already, Delia," I said heartily. "I have a reason—" I broke off, confused— "I have every reason for wishing specially to do anything you want of me. But—I don't like to ask favours of men."

"What do you mean by that? Are you hinting about Mr. Dale?"

"I certainly am not," I said explicitly; "but I don't want to ask any favours of him either, Delia. My instinct is against it."

"Oh—your instinct," Delia looked so bewildered that I was hurried into telling something I should have preferred to keep.

"He thinks I can make a writer of myself. He's done a lot for me in the way of advice, and he asked me to say nothing about it because he's refused others."

"I should say he has!" exclaimed Delia. "Why the local Federation pretty nearly went down on its knees to that man to get him to give one little, measly critical talk to our literary section. We all took up Aztec art and history—heaven knows it's the dullest thing any human being ever studied—hoping to get hold of him that way, and we offered to pay anything he'd ask. Foncie, as long as he's done you one favour why not ask another? Get him to come to our reception."

"You'd see that I can't," I said, "if you'd ever sat as I have and heard him talking with Dr. Rush. He loathes being lionised—he says it in so many words."

"I don't care whether he likes it or not," Delia hung on, "I want him anyhow. I think you might do this for me, Foncie. Harve and I have been discussing something for you—real important—it would give you a chance in the world. I can't tell you about it yet, but it seems to me

that asking a man to go to a reception would be a small return. Mr. Dale's already had our note. All we want is for you to speak to him about it and get a definite answer."

"I can't ask favours of men," I repeated conclusively.

"I suggested your going and asking a man for a place on the paper," Delia said, with a shrug that nettled me. "That worked pretty well, didn't it?"

"Pretty well," I echoed her words dryly.

"You don't seem very enthusiastic. I'm afraid Hoddy prejudiced you with his talk about there being no chance to get ahead in the 'Clarion' office."

I was hooking her up, and I looked straight into her eyes in the glass, as I said,

"Oh, yes, there is. There's one chance to get on in that office."

"What do you mean?"

"Mr. Stokes could promote me if he wanted to."

"Well—can't you keep on the good side of him?"

"I don't think I'd call it his good side. There—you're done now. Does the girdle go over or under these loops?"

"Through them. Foncie—what is it about Mr. Stokes? Doesn't he behave to you as a gentleman should?"

I laughed out.

"Never mind," I said. "I'm sorry I spoke."

Delia gave up her dressing, sat down and pulled me down beside her.

"What's the matter? I've a right to know—I as good as got you the place."

"I'm not going to say another word."

"Yes you are." Delia whacked for emphasis with her hair-brush on the dresser. "I want you to tell me exactly what's happened to make you talk that way about Mr. Stokes."

"Oh—nothing much," I said with a sense of irritation. "Harvey was right about him—that's all."

"Oh, Foncie, I did think you were too bright to keep up

the silly, sentimental ideas you got in a little place like Stanleyton. You've no business with them in a city."

"Sentimental—what do you mean?" I demanded.

"Flirting with every man you meet; thinking they're all in love with you—thinking about those things *at all*—that's what I mean. You'll find that sex and economics don't mix, Foncie."

"I wish the men were of your opinion," I flared. "I didn't bring my ideas to San Vicente. Trouble met me on the way here."

"Trouble?"

"Yes. Oh, you don't know anything about it. Men who would treat you with perfect respect will walk up to me and——"

"Oh——" Delia's voice made a little offended slide on the syllable— "do you mean that you're so much more attractive than I am?"

"Attractive?" It burst upon me that she considered this sort of thing a compliment. "For heaven's sake—no! I suppose any woman thrown out into the world helpless to earn her living, without family backing, finds just what I've found."

"People find what they're looking for, Foncie." Delia shook her head. "I'm never looking for anything improper—er—off colour. I dislike to hear about it even. What did you mean by saying that trouble met you on your way to San Vicente?"

I laughed so that it made Delia mad at last. I was sorry for that, and hurried to say,

"The first man I met at the railroad station took me for a runaway schoolgirl, and proposed to pick me up as he would have picked up a woman off the streets."

"A man on the railway." Delia's eyes were round. "Well, I know who *that* is. You told me yourself about the Tipton boy——"

"Delia!" I cried aghast, "you mustn't—it isn't fair.

Poor Joe's been one of the kindest friends I ever had. He's just a child——"

"He's a little drunkard. Everybody knows that his wildness is breaking his mother's heart. I notice you haven't denied that it was Joe Tipton."

"Certainly I deny it. It wasn't Joe. Oh, I wish I had never said such a word to you!"

"And he's a man that treats me respectfully?" Delia was groping.

"I suppose he would—of course."

"Does he live in San Vicente?"

She saw by my look that she had guessed right, and tried again.

"In Las Reudas?"

My face began to burn.

"Right here near us?—Yes—yes, he does! I see it—you needn't deny it."

"Now, Delia, I never said——"

"On which side of the street? Across? It couldn't be Mr. Steffins? He's a minister—but he does travel a good deal. Who was it, Foncie? Don't be mean. Come on—tell me. Who was it?"

Why couldn't I have kept my mouth shut? Now Delia would be eyeing every man on the block with suspicion, trying to fit the story to him—and ten chances to one never thinking of the real culprit.

"Please let it drop, Dele," I urged.

"Maybe you were mistaken." Delia's tone was full of disappointment. She grabbed up the powder puff and began dusting her nose. "You always were that way, Foncie, dear. You believed that every boy in town was crazy about you. Of course it hadn't taken any morbid turn in your mind then—naturally it wouldn't, at that early age—but didn't you even tell me, when I was visiting at Uncle Rob's, that Harve—my old Hoddy—had been one of your admirers before I met him?"

"It's a long time ago, and not worth quarrelling over, Delia, but the fact is I never said anything of the sort to you. Anyhow there's quite a difference between a school-girl's idea that somebody admires her, and a divorced woman finding that most of the men she's thrown in contact with regard her as of easy virtue."

"Foncie! What a vulgar phrase! I never heard it spoken before in my life; you must have got it out of a bad French novel. I'm afraid you just make up your mind that the men mean something wrong, and behave as if they did—and there you are."

"Yes," I said, "there I am. I want to go around past Mrs. Eccles's, so I think I'll take the other line. Good-bye."

"Well, don't fly off like that," Delia dived for her hat, gloves, opera glasses and motor wrap, since they would be coming home in the machine. "Wait a minute and I'll walk as far as the street with you."

Not another word was said till we got to the front door, then Delia began,

"Foncie, I don't want you to get the impression that I'm picking at you, but indeed and truly I feel you need a word of advice. Look at me—and the women I go with. We take up subjects of study that develop the mind and keep it from running on such things as you've been talking about."

"Study," I echoed— "Aztec art, for instance."

I knew it was hateful, but by this time I was too mad to care.

"Yes—Aztec art." Delia's voice wobbled a little, but she wouldn't give up. "That sort of thing broadens a woman. It makes her attractive to the right kind of men in the right kind of way."

"But not attractive enough to get them to come to a reception when you want them to," I snapped. "What's the use, Dele—I've got no time for courses of study."

"Well you need it—or something. Your talk back there in the room sounded like an oversexed girl—one that couldn't associate with a man on any other ground."

As we moved in angry silence down the walk, I stepped on Fairy and she yelped frightfully. Delia glared at me, as though I had tried to kill the little creature. When it came to where our ways parted I stopped and faced her,

"Do you mean to say I'm that?" I asked.

"What?"

"Oversexed."

Her face crimsoned.

"I never said such a thing," she protested tartly.

"You used the word."

"I said that what you said sounded like it," she quibbled. "It did. Just think a minute of the string of stuff you told me—why, you knocked every man you mentioned. It's an awful habit to get into. I wonder——"

She broke off and looked up and down the street. A young fellow in knickerbockers and cap was crossing from the direction of the country club, a couple of dogs at his heels. I saw she was trying to make up her mind which neighbour of hers I had accused.

"Oh, for goodness' sake don't begin on that again!" I forestalled her. "It won't do you any good. I'm not going to tell."

"Well, I—" Delia began; then the young fellow with the dogs came abreast of us. As I whirled, he pulled off his cap; I saw the forward duck of the sleek dark head. "Good evening, Mr. Pendleton," Delia finished.

He stopped to shake hands. Delia seemed pleased, and flustered. "Let—let me present you to my friend, Mrs. Baird," she offered effusively.

Young Pendleton slid an amused glance my way.

"Oh, we're already acquainted," he said, shaking my hand in turn. "I met Mrs. Baird on her way to San Vicente."

"Uh—" Delia stared. "Uh—why—yes." Bewilderment held her quiet. There wasn't anything I could do except to cut it short and get away, though I did leave them there together. Now she would have something to say to me at that coming Sunday dinner! I was prickles all over, as I went around for my visit with Boy. Yet later, riding home in the car, I laughed to myself half hysterically. Things were in a foolish, foolish mess—but it was funny. I wondered if Delia would tell me next time I met her that Al Pendleton had always treated her as a gentleman should! I was sorry to have set off a thing like that about her next door neighbour, and yet I couldn't let poor Joe Ed stand for it.

Joe Ed had taken to coming to the house a good deal more than I wished he would, waylaying me in the halls, sitting on the couch down there and strumming on his ukelele and singing "I Love You, California." He said "Cap" would want to know how I was getting on. He told me of Bice, who hadn't been able to get steady work, and was drifting from one San Francisco saloon to another doing odd jobs. He brought a gift for Boyce from the negro, a minute silk handkerchief of ferocious colouring, which appealed so directly to my son's taste that it at once became almost a part of his person. But the last time Joe Ed was up, I thought that underneath the fun and banter there was something like worry.

All this was on my mind as I got off the car, and it seemed like an echo of my thoughts when I heard, very guarded, sounding from the shadows of the little alleyway that led to Mr. Dale's bungalow, that same old tune whistled as nobody but Joe Ed ever whistled it. I stopped in the light of the doorway. The whistle stopped too. I took a step and got out my key. The whistling started up again a little louder. I turned and called,

"Joe—is that you?"

For answer there came a warning hiss, an arm waved

from behind the vines, and I went down to find the boy lurking there.

"Callie," he said hurriedly, "I want to ask a favour of you. Come back here where it's dark. Could you pack my extra things that are on the top shelf of your closet in Billy's suit-case—it's under the bed or around somewhere—and sneak them out to me? I hate to ask you, but——"

He broke off, and we stood together in the dark there quite a minute. Then he reached out and caught both my hands, whispering,

"You're a good little scout! I do hate to ask you, honey!"

"Good evening. Oh, it's you, Mrs. Baird. I'd given you up, and was going out. Are you intending to work to-night?"

Mr. Dale stopped and appeared to survey us. He must have had that kind of eyes that can see in the dark, for I noticed that the lift of his hat included Joe Ed. Then I realised that coming from his end of the tunnel he had got the silhouette of our figures against the light of the street. "Yes, of course—if you want me to."

"I'll be back in five minutes," Mr. Dale snapped his watch—he certainly did have cat's eyes to see it where we stood. "I'll just go down to the drug-store and get a cigar and be with you."

He passed on. The smoking was a new thing which Dr. Rush had begun to allow him only a week ago, saying that he was now a practically sound man. As soon as he was gone I said to Joe Ed,

"I'll get the things right now if you'll wait here."

"Good girl," he detained me, holding to my hand. "She doesn't ask why I daresn't go in the house. Just like her. Don't bring the stuff out yet—somebody might see you. I'll go along now, and you meet me over in the square after you're done with Dale."

"It may be pretty late," I hesitated. "Sometimes we work till after eleven."

"All the better," Joe Ed whispered nervously. "You'll make sure that nobody sees you?"

We had rather an extra amount of work on hand that night, and I was so uneasy about Joe Ed that Mr. Dale finally asked me what was the matter. For the sake of having something to say I told him about Delia's plea. He laughed in his usual half-sarcastic fashion, and made no sort of answer. At last we were done; I got away at a quarter past eleven.

It took me only a few minutes to pack the suit-case, for I had sorted out everything that didn't belong to me weeks ago. Then there was the question of getting it to Joe Ed without being seen. I opened the door and cautiously scouted the halls. There seemed to be no one in the front one downstairs; but voices from the kitchen showed me that I might meet the girls coming up. I covered the suit-case with some loose garments as though it had been sewing for Miss Chandler, took it up in my arms and ran breathlessly to refuge in her little passageway. I was there when Addie and Orma went by up to their room. I dropped off the garments and left them, slipping on down the big stairway, finding a light in the front hall, but the portieres were pulled in such a way that if there was a late lingerer by the hearth, I could get past unnoticed.

Once out on the street I took a free breath, and walked on, holding up my head. I found Joe Ed over in the little square. He stepped out from beneath a palm tree and took the suit-case from me, thrust an arm through mine and hurried me along to the further end of the place where a bench stood in the shadows. The minute he spoke I remembered what Delia had said, for it was very plain he had been drinking. He was flurried, excited, out of himself—not at all like anything I had ever seen of him. He spoke again about my being so good not to ask questions.

"Just because you don't—I'm going to tell you," he said. "I've got to skip. There are papers out after me. Some shyster lawyer's got hold of Addie—and—I've got to skip."

We had taken the bench in the shadows, but he couldn't sit still; he got up and pulled me with him, and we walked back and forth.

"You've got troubles enough of your own," he went on, "and here I'm dumping mine on your doorstep. I'll bet you hate me for it all right."

"I'm very fond of you, Joe. I'm—glad to do anything to help." I said it sincerely. "I don't forget how good you were to me. You've always been different from the others. They——"

"Different!" he broke in, turning to look down at me from his tall height. "Different—like hell I am! I've been dead in love with you from the first minute I saw you in the vestibule there—Cap giving you what-for—you standing up to him like a soldier. I suppose this isn't a very good time to ask a lady to marry you—but you say the word, honey, and we'll skip together. I've got thirty dollars in my pocket. Not much—but it'd keep us a few days—I can always get a job. What?"

I laughed at him. Yet I don't suppose there ever was the woman on earth who could receive any sort of a proposal of marriage without a thrill.

"What's funny about it?" he demanded, pulling up jerkily. "You've got your divorce—haven't you? We could get married all righty. Come on. You don't think so, but I'd take good care of you."

"Joe," I spoke solemnly, "how old are you?"

"What's that got to do with it? I'm good and plenty taller than you are—see?" He reached around and measured the height of my head against his shoulder.

"How old are you?" I repeated.

"We-el," reluctantly, in a tone of argument, "I'll vote next Presidential election."

"I could have voted last election," I said, "if I'd registered for it. You're just a boy, Joe. I'm a divorced woman, with a child dependent upon me. You want to get it out of your foolish mind that you're in love with me."

"California," he sighed, dropping the suit-case he had carried till now, putting both hands on my shoulders and turning me to such dim light as there was, so he could look full in my face, "you're no expert on the love game—I see that. My mind? Folks don't fall in love with their minds. As far as you and I are concerned, I fell in all over. But let it pass, honey. Of course, you're dead right. Here you are with the kid—and the only helping hand I give you is when I reach out and try to pull you into my kettle of hot water. Kiss me good-bye—and I'll go."

CHAPTER XIII

THE CHANCE I GOT

I WAS glad that Joe Ed had asked me to sneak out his runaway duds; glad I had been the one to spare his mother that. The heart of such a woman is as impenetrable as a deep, deep pool; but in the weeks that followed Joe Ed's departure, she appeared to get thinner and thinner, and that little fluting voice of hers went up and up till it was a mere chirp. I think nobody else noticed it, and I only saw it because I had the key to the situation. I couldn't say that her manner toward me was kinder; it had always been suave courtesy itself, but I used to fancy sometimes she lingered in my neighbourhood, not as if she were going to speak, but as if being there was a sort of communication.

I got one letter from Joe Ed calling himself names and apologising; he seemed to feel that he had finally and once for all done for any good opinion I might ever have had of him. Yet he was an incorrigibly cheerful soul; he said nobody was to worry about him; that he'd get along—he always had. There was no address. He thought he'd keep on the wing for a while. At the end he told me that he was ashamed of the way he asked me to marry him—but that he meant it all the same, and the offer was still open.

My own affairs at the "Clarion" office had shaped themselves into a sort of routine; I didn't trouble myself much about Mr. Stokes now, except when I tried again to get him to give me a really worth-while assignment. He always put me off—but held out hopes. It kept me sitting on the edge of my chair, and mad enough to bite. He certainly was a bully. Rosalie said she knew men like a

book. I suppose she did—but, according to her view, the story was a disagreeable one. I was always asking her if she believed Mr. Stokes would ever let me have my chance, and finally she said:

“I’ll tell you what you do, Cal. The next time he goes to San Francisco on a drunk—oh, you needn’t look surprised; that’s all he ever goes up there for; he doesn’t drink in San Vicente—the next time he’s fixing to start, you ask him for an assignment, and I’ll back you. He’s easy when he wants to get off for a spree.”

But, to my surprise, it was Mr. Stokes himself who actually made me the offer. It was Saturday evening; I was sitting later than usual, hurrying through some letters he had dictated at the last minute. I thought he had already left the office, when I heard him get up, come to the open door between the rooms; and I could see out of the corner of my eye that he stood there staring at me.

“Sis—still got writing ambitions?” he grunted. My fingers on the keys stopped instantly. I looked up.

“Are you going to give me something?”

“Do you think you and Bailey could handle local politics—with me away?” He kept looking at me. “I reckon I oughtn’t to go up to Frisco and leave you two light-weights to hold this down.”

“What is it?” I tried to be calm.

“I’ve just heard that Murphy and Turk Thompson have got a little caucus on in the back room of a saloon out at the edge of town on Millward street. There’s to be slate-making. They won’t get together much before midnight. The Frisco train that I want leaves at ten o’clock, but I’ve got to stay over and cover the thing because you two females would be afraid to go out there.”

“We wouldn’t.” My voice wavered a little. “Rosy’s never afraid of anything. You know it.”

“How about you?”

“Just try me.”

I got up from the machine with my finished letters flut-

tering in my hands, I was so excited. I was to sign them with a rubber stamp and get them off. Mr. Stokes began to back out of the doorway.

"If Rosalie'll go, I will," I said. "We'll be together. Newspaper reporters have to go everywhere at all sorts of times."

"All right—you for it." He stumped back to his desk; I heard him slamming things around and whistling as he made ready—for San Francisco, and his spree.

"Where do I meet Miss Bailey—when?" I called in to him.

"Leave the car at the corner of Millward and Chandler streets. She'll be waiting. I told you they wouldn't get at it much before midnight," and he went whistling and clattering downstairs like a big, clumsy boy let out of school.

I found myself ridiculously excited, and had to calm down; Mrs. Eccles was to bring Boy to the Poinsettia that evening not earlier than six o'clock. I intended to keep him for the night, a thing I had managed twice before without Mrs. Thrasher's knowing of it. She made no objection to his daylight visits, but I knew without asking that she wouldn't give permission for his staying over night. She'd think it was the entering wedge. I got my pay envelope as I went out past the desk. I carried home a pint of good milk and a delicatessen meal in little paste-board cartons. Of course, I should be taking a risk to go out and leave him alone in the room, but the appointment was so late that I thought he would be certain to sleep—or I might speak to Orma about him.

We had quite a joyful feast, making a funny game of whispering and stepping very softly, and at half-past seven I threw myself on the bed beside him and lay there till he was fast asleep. I dropped off myself, and wakened with a start to hear the clock on the landing strike eleven!

I jumped up and grabbed my hat and notebook. Suppose poor Rosalie got out there and waited for me? Sup-

pose I didn't arrive till after the meeting was over? I never gave a thought to telling Orma that Boy was in my room—I just ran down the steps and hurried out to catch the first Chandler street car I could. At that hour I had the street car all to myself. It was a longer ride than I had expected, but finally the conductor called me for Millward street. Was I too late? No—as I climbed down from the car I saw a figure waiting in the shadow of the eucalyptus. I went toward the curb; the car hummed on without me. This figure detached itself from the darkness and came forward. It was Mr. Stokes.

I'm not suspicious. I looked right past him for Miss Bailey.

"Where's Rosalie?" I asked, jealously. "What made you stay over? She and I could look after it. What was the use of my coming away out here if you were going to do the work?"

"You're late," he grunted. "I'd begun to think you weren't coming at all. Here. This way."

He took hold of my arm and steered me down the side street, where a row of pepper trees dropped their green laces so low that an occasional branch touched you as you walked under. It didn't look the kind of place where you'd find a saloon. I pulled back, demanding:

"Is Rosalie down there?"

"Don't ask so many questions," lunging to take my arm again. I sidled away.

"Am I to help *you* report the meeting? I wouldn't have come if you'd told me that."

I looked about, warily holding my distance from Mr. Stokes. We were midway of a long, dark block—as far back as forward—I'd better keep on with him.

"You needn't get sassy, either. I want to talk to you, Sister. You don't give me any chance in the office."

"Talk, then," I said, getting ahead as fast as I could—almost running. I meant to dodge right down the other street at the next corner, whatever he might think of me.

"Don't be in such a darned hurry." He lumbered along beside me. "You might as well be nice—now you're out here. Hold on; it ain't going to hurt you to love me a little. You'd get along better in the office if you did."

I'd kept as much of the sidewalk between us as I could. But he was crowding toward my side so that it was either to go off in the weeds or have him take my arm again. Well, we were at the corner. I faced round on him.

"Love you!" I spluttered. "I wouldn't love you if you were the last man in the world! You had no business to——"

"Shucks!" he broke in, grabbing for me. "We needn't split hairs over a word. You know why I gave you a place. You know I think a lot of you. I do. I'd care more for you than for any of them. You can't stay in the same office with me and keep standing me off."

"Stay in the same office with you!" I choked. "Do you think I'll ever put my foot in the 'Clarion' office again after this? You can tell them so—and why!"

I dodged past him and ran—as I never knew I could run. I heard him call after me, and flew the faster. I thought I rounded the next corner toward Chandler street and the car line, but the streets were cut differently here; no car line was in sight. I had lost my hat; my hair was down. I was glad that all about me was dim and silent. I brought up suddenly with the knowledge that it must be well past midnight and I didn't know where I was.

I tried to calm myself and take my bearings. Most of the hairpins were gone from my hair; I finally braided it in a single plait down my back, trying all the time to get back to Chandler street. I was thoroughly lost. Well, anyhow, I didn't look fit to get on a street car; I just took the general direction by the tower of the Cronin Building and started in to walk it. The steady movement did me good. By the time I got in the streets I knew I was quite steadied down. I pretty nearly went to pieces again though when I reached the Poinsettia door, felt for my

latch-key and found it wasn't there! I'd lost it. Here it was, after two o'clock; I was locked out, Boy up in my room, and no one knew of his being there. I walked along the two sides of the house, looking up at its windows; all black, except where they caught the reflection from the street lamps. If I could have reached Mrs. Tipton—but her window was above the tunnel; no way to get at it. Grotesquely enough, the only windows I could easily reach would be those of Mrs. Thrasher and Mrs. or Miss Tutt. I could fling a handful of gravel up to any of these, and I giggled a little hysterically at the thought. If I rang the bell to get hold of Orma, the house would be roused and everybody would have to know the story to-morrow. I stole down the tunnel to see if, by any blessed chance, Mr. Dale should have been working late. No—his little dwelling was as black and still as the other, the curtains drawn on his sleeping porch. I must have prowled around there for a quarter of an hour, trying to find some way to climb up to the kitchen roof—once there, I could easily get in at the window. I am light and active for a woman; but the thing was hopeless.

Twice I went and stood under the sleeping porch and spoke Mr. Dale's name in a guarded tone, but it didn't rouse him. Finally, as I was trying to clamber up on the garbage can that stood by the kitchen steps, I felt sure I heard Boyce in the room above cry out. I must get in there. Of course, he often did call out in his sleep—and then make no further disturbance, but if he once waked up and found himself alone, he'd raise the house—and then I should have to leave the Poinsettia in disgrace.

Half laughing, I ran back once more to the bungalow's sleeping porch, called Mr. Dale's name—sharply this time—with no result. Then I put a hasty hand through the curtain, shaking them a little, fumbled forward, and before I knew it, touched his face.

"Oh!" I spoke louder than I had done yet. "Mr. Dale!"

"Yes. What? Who is it?" His voice answered promptly.

"It's Mrs. Baird——" I got no further; his feet struck the floor, as he interrupted:

"Yes. Wait a minute. I'll open the door for you."

"I—I'm locked out," I called through the curtains. "I forgot my key. Boy's in my room. I must get in to him. I thought maybe you could help me—the window."

"Oh—certainly." Mr. Dale's first replies had been in that odd tone one gets from a person just roused from deep sleep. Now he spoke like his normal self. "I'll get something on and be with you in a minute," he said.

I went back to my hopeful garbage can, which was as tall as a barrel, yet with an inhospitable, peaked top. Almost immediately he joined me there, sized up the situation, and went to his house for a step-ladder. The adventure seemed to amuse him.

"I shouldn't need it for myself," he said, as he came back with the easy way, "but I pay you the compliment of supposing that this is out of the common for you. Up you go—no, I'll have to get there first and reach down for you."

We whispered and laughed like truant children. He went up the ladder, caught the roof edge and swung himself to it easily, then lay on its flat surface and reached down for me.

"Come on," he urged. "Don't be afraid. I can lift your weight. I used to be rather good at this sort of thing."

"I don't know what I should have done without you," I whispered energetically, as he got me across the flat roof to my window sill, and pulled the sash open for me. "Thank you a thousand times."

"You're a thousand times welcome." Mr. Dale slid back toward the roof edge and the ladder, and I went in to Boy.

CHAPTER XIV

A BREACH

I WAS so worn out, and burnt out with the rage I'd been in and the terror, that I just pulled off a few of my clothes and crawled in beside Boy and slept like a stoker. I'd lost my job; I had a horrid sinking feeling that I wasn't a very good person to get and hold a job—but to-morrow was another day—it would have to take care of itself—at the minute my mere physical exhaustion brought me peace.

The first light waked me, showed me my dusty shoes in the middle of the floor, and brought back the whole thing. It was Sunday morning. Mrs. Eccles was spending the day with her daughter at Corinth. Boy and I were due out at Delia's for that two o'clock Sunday dinner. It would be the first time I'd seen her since she walked away beside young Pendleton, and now I had to tell her of my leaving the "Clarion"—and why. I lay there quite a while; the more I thought about it, the more I determined to tell her and Harvey as little as I possibly could. Let them think what they pleased. The only thing that could hurt me was self-distrust.

I went back over the months since I'd left my husband. It was nearly a year now. In a few weeks my decree of divorce would be made final. A little more than three months of the time had gone to my schooling at the business college. I had done well there. My work since with Mr. Dale had kept up my practice. I wondered if I dared try San Francisco. Maybe it would be a good thing for me to get away from San Vicente. The idea may have been only cowardice—a disposition to turn my back on

the problem that was too hard for me—but it certainly seemed very attractive. Then Boy woke up and there was no more thinking possible.

The worst I had expected was that Delia would look terribly knowing when we met, and that as soon as she got me alone, I'd be in for another lecture. But you know how it is that sometimes you go to a friend's house and the atmosphere is different—all queer—you feel as though something had happened there since you last saw the folks that had made a change, and you don't know what it is, and keep trying to find out without asking. It was that way at Delia's from the minute she met me in the hall, and hardly waited to kiss me before she called in to the living-room:

"Hod—they've come."

Harvey came right out, and Boy ran to him to show his new socks with blue plaid at their tops. It was kind of funny to see Harvey and Delia stand there side by side like people in a picture, or the President and his lady holding a reception. It struck me that I had never seen them stand just that way, for this time it wasn't Delia who reached out and took hold of her husband; Harvey put his hand on her shoulder to call her attention as he asked:

"Are those the ones you got for Buster, Deedie?"

It turned out that they were the ones. Delia pretty nearly dressed Boy these days; she bent down now to straighten up the socks of her choosing and purchasing, and fluff out the tie that matched them, demanding:

"Don't they go perfectly together? I had the greatest time getting just that shade of Holland blue, but I would have it because it washes so well."

We higgled-haggled through the dinner; the conversation bumped along like a wagon on a corduroy road. There seemed to be nothing but contention in the air. Everything that came up was disagreed about. It didn't seem to me that I was the one who started it; I had made up

my mind that since the deluge was to arrive to-morrow anyhow, I would try to be cheerful to-day and not think about it; but whether we spoke of the weather or the possibility of Judge Hoard running for Congress, I found myself on one side, with Harvey and Dele solid on the other. I was used to Harvey's almost abject laudation of the judge—he had cases coming up before him. And what was it to me that Delia kept speaking of Miss Chandler as "Gene"—remarking that they hadn't been thrown together much of late, but it was an *old* friendship. Yet I did find it hard to hold my tongue when, failing to get a rise out of me, she gave me a disparaging side glance and observed, "Of course, Gene stands where she can afford to be—well—select."

Boy was across the table from me; he kept feeding Fairy, and Dele wouldn't let me stop him, though the dog's noise pretty nearly broke up any sort of conversation, and she complained of it herself. They seemed to have their own ideas about my son, so I let his eating alone, though a good deal of it went squarely against my rules. I could see what Mrs. Eccles meant by saying it wasn't good for him to be there so much. Well—never mind—maybe we wouldn't stay in San Vicente much longer. They certainly had done a great deal for the child.

When we got up from the table Harvey proposed to take Boy out with him in the car.

"We'll only be gone about half an hour, Deedie," he said; "just to the Heights and back; you girls can have your talk, and then come for a ride with us afterward if you want to."

"You'd better make it an hour." Delia was very business-like. "Fornia and I will want that much time anyhow."

I stared in surprise while Harvey got his dust coat and cap, and he and Boy clattered away, the dog at their heels, to the garage for the machine. He and Delia seemed to

have it all arranged between them; how did they know that there was anything special I wanted to say to her?

"Shall we sit in the library?" Delia asked. "Or would you rather go up to my room? We'd be more alone up there."

"I guess we'd better sit here, hadn't we?" I led the way into the room they called the library. "It won't take me long to tell you the news."

"News?" Delia looked startled.

"Yes. I've left the 'Clarion.' Now, don't ask me why. It wouldn't do a bit of good to tell you, because I'm never going back there."

"What are you going to do?"

I had got into a Morris chair and sat staring straight at the hearth, where Wo Far's laid fire waited for the match anybody might care to touch to it on a foggy day or for a chilly evening, July though it was.

"I haven't made up my mind." I didn't glance at Delia, but I knew just how she sat, looking sort of plump and propped-up, in her own particular rocker across from me. The air between us was full of accusation and reproof.

"What do you want to do?" she asked, and I was relieved that she did not instantly try to find out the reason for my leaving the "Clarion" so suddenly.

"I don't quite know," I hesitated. "I sort of think I'd like to go to San Francisco—if I could get work there."

"You oughtn't to take Jack—to the city." Delia spoke very positively.

"Perhaps not. It's the thing that troubles me right now."

"We'd keep him. We want to—Foncie, that's what I was going to talk to you about to-day."

I looked at her in surprise; her tone was so queer. There she sat—on the edge of her chair, sure enough—

staring at me with very round eyes and a kind of fascinated curiosity, as if I had been some strange animal she had never seen before. It came over me all at once that what she and Harvey were fixing for had nothing to do with my personal plans, but concerned something they were arranging themselves.

"You wanted to talk to me?" I echoed.

"Yes. When you told me that awful thing about Al Pendleton—I went straight to Hod with it."

"You did?" (But, of course, I might have known she would.) "Please remember that I didn't *tell* you anything about that matter, Delia. You jumped to your own conclusions. You may be entirely wrong. I'm not saying anything."

"You don't have to. I know all about it, and——" she gulped—"and the other, too."

"What other?"

"Hod."

"What!" I half started up from my chair. Delia reached to pull me back.

"Yes, Hod." She nodded palely. "He was so mad about Pendleton that I knew there was something wrong, and I taxed him with it."

"You——" I broke in, but she ran right over me, excited, fluent.

"He didn't try to deceive me—but there wouldn't have been any use if he had. As soon as I got to thinking about it, I saw the whole thing. I've forgiven him—and I forgive you, Foncie. I'm willing to take the little boy, just the same."

"You forgive—you're willing! Delia, there's been nothing to forgive. You talk as though——"

"We needn't go into it." Delia shut her lips hard together and shook her head. "I guess Hoddy gave me the facts before he was done with it. He was on his knees at the last, and pretty near crying. I'm not mad at you."

I'm not the *least bit* jealous. I'm sorry for you—but, of course, after this we can't——”

I jumped out of Delia's Morris chair as though it had been hot.

“I'll get my things and stop Harvey before he gets away.”

Delia hung on to me.

“What about our offer to take the child?”

I stared at her silently.

“Hod wants to adopt him—keep him and educate him. I'm willing.”

“Dele, what do you take me for? Did you think I'd let you—or anybody—have my child?”

“You're foolish if you don't. You could go up to San Francisco and get a place in peace then. It would be better for you and better for him. It seems to me a mother should put her child's interests first.”

I had laid my things off on Delia's bed. As I ran up the stairs, she following, talking, panting, holding out her hands in my direction but not quite touching me, as though she thought I might burn or blow up if she laid a finger on me, we heard the car roll out of the garage. I grabbed up my hat, stuck it on and began jabbing the pins through.

“You've got it on crooked!” Delia cried, as I dived at my scarf and Boy's rolled-up pajamas. “Come back here and see it in the glass. It's right over your ear. You look awful.” She came on, remonstrating all the way down the stairs.

“I don't care how I look. Let me alone!” pulling away from her.

“Oh, you're so reckless,” Delia whimpered—and neither of us had sense of humour enough left to laugh. “A reckless, headstrong girl like you—crazy about the men—has no business dragging a poor little child around in the sort of things that she'll get mixed up with.”

"Hush!" I turned on her in the front door. She faltered back from me a little, muttering:

"Harvey says——"

"Don't you tell me what Harvey said," I interrupted, fiercely. "If he's got anything to say—he'd better say it to me."

The machine was at the curb and waiting for us. Far down the beautiful, broad, Sunday-quiet street people were passing. The nurse was wheeling the Pendleton baby in at the place next door. Harvey, looking a good deal surprised, got down and opened the door of the tonneau. He must have thought we had got through with our talk very quickly. I almost ran down the walk.

"Come, Boyce," I called, as soon as I got within hailing distance. "You're going with me."

Harvey seemed to notice then, for the first time, that Delia hadn't a hat on. I went up close to the car and reached for Boyce.

"No," said my hopeful, "I'm a-gonna ride on front seat. You gurruls can get in back."

"Yes, yes," Harvey seconded him hurriedly. "Get in—get in, won't you? We've got plenty of time for a nice ride."

"Boy—come to mother—this minute." I paid no attention to Harvey or Delia. But Boy travelled swiftly, sitting as he was, to the further end of the seat, beyond the stretch of my fingers. He got behind the steering wheel and defied me.

"Now, Calla, you don't want to——" Harvey's voice suddenly collapsed in a husky little break as I turned on him, demanding:

"Will you get out of my way and let me around so I can lift Boyce out?"

As he stood hampering me, I saw his glance go past to Delia, and she answered as though he had spoken:

"I don't see what I said, but Foncie's furious. That's

the way; people *do* the most awful things, and then if a word's said, they fly into a rage."

"Never mind, Delia," I spoke over my shoulder; "this is the last time you'll be troubled with saying—or not saying—words to me. Harvey—lift Boyce out."

"You'll have to do it yourself if it's going to be done," Harvey mumbled, looking off down street. "You're acting against the child's best interests. I won't raise a finger. If you think well to quarrel with an old friend—a friend of your parents—and——"

I stared at him where he stood, hostile, thoroughly scared, in his eyes the terror of what I might have said or would say against him.

"Do you have the face to hint that it isn't to my child's best interests to be with me?" I rounded on him. "That certainly would be funny—from you!"

"Foncie—don't make a scene out here on the street," Delia broke in.

"I'm not!" I cried. "It's you people. Harvey, what have you been saying to Delia about me?"

"Now, Foncie," Delia rushed in again. "Hod didn't blame you in telling me about it. He took all the blame himself. He said that he, being a man and older, ought to've warned you. He wouldn't admit that you were one of these kind of women that go around trying to break up families. He stuck to it that it was just because you——"

"Delia—be still," I said. "I asked Harvey a question—and he hasn't answered it."

"Calla!" Harvey's voice was husky, but he seemed to see he must speak up before Delia. "I—you——" He cleared his throat and launched out desperately. "What's the use of denying it? You know well enough that you were at my office all the time, and came out here continually—a man with his wife away—you know what that means?"

The lawyer impudence of him paralysed me for the moment—kept me speechless.

“Unh-hunh,” said Delia. The sound seemed to cheer Harvey on. He finished with considerable dignity.

“I never intended to tell Dele anything about it; I wouldn’t have, on your account, if she hadn’t come to me with these stories of yours—on—a lot of men.”

He had been looking at the ground, scuffling with his foot. He raised his eyes now, full of ugly anger. “When it gets down to Al Pendleton—yes—I’m ready to say that the child would be a lot better off with us—with any respectable married couple.”

“A respectable married couple!” I looked from one to the other of them. I think I never was so furious in my life. At first it choked me; then, when the words began to come, I couldn’t think of anything bad enough to say, and stuttered it over again, “A respectable married couple! How dare you, Harvey Watkins—a dirty fellow like you—and such a fool as Delia—hasn’t sense enough to know when an honest woman is being lied about! I don’t care if he is your husband, Dele—I don’t care if he is your husband! You ought to have known better than to believe that silly mess of lies—about me!”

Delia gaped at me with eyes like saucers. Then her bewildered gaze fastened itself on the pasty pallor of Harvey’s face.

“Uh—uh——” she began, stumblingly. “We’ve tried to be good to you and the child——”

I laughed loud like a crazy thing.

“Well, for pity’s sake, don’t try any more then,” I said. “This ends it. This wipes out every kindness, every favor. Let you have Boyce?” My face burned; my eyes felt hot in my head. I looked from one of them to the other. “He’d better starve than be with such people.”

I shoved Harvey aside—since I couldn’t knock him down—climbed into the auto and seized Boy. So far he

had sat looking doubtfully at us all; I had been afraid he would try to take a hand—or cry. But no, my fury seemed to cow him, for he came silently, and only spoke when I had set him on his two feet on the sidewalk.

“Gramma’s gone away,” was what he said, and his voice wabbled. Mrs. Eccles wouldn’t be back till five o’clock.

“Never mind,” I led him away, Delia and Harvey beside the machine staring after us; “we’ll go down to the movies.”

Boyce was delighted. He forgot the strange scene, as children do, or stowed it away in that queer little mind of his, to bring out and ask questions about at some leisure moment when there wasn’t any motion picture show on hand.

We walked down to the foot of the hill, where, beside the Burmeister Grocery, there was a little photo theatre. I paid my dime and sat in the darkened place while things were flashed on the screen and a mechanical piano made a noise that was intended for music; but I neither saw nor heard anything that was about me. When Boy bounced and chortled in his seat over something that pleased him extra well, I squeezed his hand or answered his whispered question, but the picture that raced before my mind, shutting out everything else, was Harvey on his knees, his head in Dele’s lap, confessing tearfully that I had tried to lead him astray!

When the show was over it was time to take Boy up to Mrs. Eccles’s. He ran right to her. I suppose I hadn’t been a very responsive companion. He wanted somebody that he could tell about the pictures. While he was on her lap, eagerly describing them, pulling her face around to get her attention, I told her quietly, and in the fewest possible words, that he was not to go to the Watkins’s any more—*under any circumstances*. I left it at that. Mrs. Eccles was glad enough to accept the order, without asking any questions.

I kissed Boy good-bye and walked back to the head of the hill. While I was waiting for the car in to San Vicente, who should get off the outbound but Delia's warm personal friend, "Gene Chandler," looking indeed select, and extremely elegant, in an outfit I had never before seen.

"Why, Callie, what's the matter?" was her first word.

It touched me. Mrs. Eccles hadn't seen anything wrong, but as I shook my head and said, "Nothing," Miss Chandler caught my elbow, turned me around, and started off with:

"Don't tell me that—something's happened. You look wretched. Let's go over to the tea-room. A good hot cup of tea will help you, maybe. If there's anything I can do—just tell me."

The Country Club has a big shingle-and-boulder building out at Las Reudas overlooking the golf links and the valley with the town in it. I had never been inside before, but Miss Chandler seemed to be well known there. She was treated with marked deference. As it was Sunday afternoon, the place was full; but a word from her to one of the waiters got for us a private nook—a little table out on a balcony, all to ourselves.

"Now," said Miss Chandler, when we sat at last with the steaming pot of tea, the rack of toast and the tiny saucers of jam before us, "tell me all about it and you'll feel better."

I couldn't hold away from her true kindness. I did tell her all about it. She listened and nodded, and the names she called Harvey were a great comfort to me. The way she helped me most, however, was by saying, finally:

"Do you mind if I laugh? Callie—if it didn't make you so mad, you'd see that it's one of the funniest things that ever happened. Here you are, going against reason and common sense to keep the very last limit of the letter of the law—and an old dub like that, who did his best to bring you to his little way of thinking, can get scared for

fear you'd tell on him, and run to his old dub wife and sick her on you—and bring in Al Pendleton, that you snubbed unmercifully—it certainly is one great big joke.”

“Maybe I'll see the fun in it some time,” I said. “Just now you're right; I'm too mad. It comes on top of my losing my place.”

“On the ‘Clarion’?”

“Yes.”

“Anything else in sight?”

“No.” I hated to say that to her, but it was the truth. “I'd like to go to San Francisco if I could, and try for a position there.”

My cup of tea and the pleasant surroundings, with an attentive waiter and the feeling that I was somebody, had done me good. I felt grateful to Miss Chandler. She leaned back in her chair and studied me with an odd expression for some time before she spoke again.

“I'm glad I chanced to be out here to-day,” she said, softly. “I've got a duty call to make on an old friend of mother's that's in Las Reudas from the East. Such a bore—but now I'm glad it happened.”

“So am I,” I echoed, heartily.

She still kept sending that odd, sidelong glance toward me as she called the waiter, paid our check and added a liberal tip; but it was not till we were out on the street and about to part that she spoke.

“What are you going to do now, Calla?”

“Get home as quick as I can,” I said, wilfully misunderstanding her. “I've got work for Mr. Dale to-night.”

“Dale!” she echoed, with light scorn. “Don't you know there's nothing there for you?”

When I didn't answer:

“Callie,” she began again, with a funny little defiant air, “I don't suppose you'll pay any attention to it—even down and out as you are, with no job, and all your good Pharisee friends lending you a kick instead of a hand up

—but I'm going to say it once more. There will be a motor trip to the Pendleton camp in a few days. They would be tickled to death to have you. I always wished you'd go—once. Seems to me you might—now. Oh, well," she threw her head back and laughed at sight of my face, "I didn't say a word, did I? Good-bye."

"Good-bye," I answered, and watched her down the block—she was the most graceful thing—this new dress set off her figure to perfection. Then I turned, rested, refreshed, toward that straight road which was mine to travel.

CHAPTER XV

CHLORODYNE

THE first thing I did Monday morning was to ring up the "Clarion" office and find whether Mr. Stokes had gone to San Francisco. If he was out of the way, I wanted to get my things. He was. When I went up, there were two reporters in the main room clacking away at typewriters, and Rosalie, inside at Mr. Stokes's desk. She motioned for me to come in and shut the door, crying, guardedly:

"Lord, but it's a relief to see you here all right. Sit down, honey. I believe if you hadn't come in for five minutes more, I'd have had a fit."

She surveyed me from hat to shoes, then back again; bent and pulled open the bottom drawer of the desk, and took out—my little black sailor. For a moment we two women looked at each other across it; then she whispered:

"Cal—you don't know how I felt when I found that thing out there."

"Were you out there?" I cried.

"Course I was. I got on to what that fool was up to and followed him. When I found your hat—and him lying to me every jump—I was so blind mad—and scared—that I couldn't do anything but blubber—like I'm doing now." She wiped her eyes. "All day Sunday I wanted to ring up. I'd have done it first thing this morning, but I give you my word I was afraid to. I never knew Bill to tear off any rough stuff before. He usually just takes what comes easy. But after I found that hat—— Cal, are you going to complain to the management?"

I shook my head.

"You're wise. It wouldn't do any good. They know

what he is—about women. They keep him here because they can get him cheap on account of his rep and his habits—and he does the work all right. A scandal wouldn't hurt anyone but you—and my sister. I don't see how she lives with him. Of course, she's got his children. It's her bread and butter, and theirs; but I'd divorce him or kill him if I was tied up to him. I knew the devil was to pay when I found he'd stayed over on the sly. You see, you'd held out against him. That's what made you so attractive. Not but what you're pretty enough and sweet enough—but Bill generally sits tight and lets 'em fall into his lap. This is kind of a new wrinkle for him. I'm glad you're not going to the management about it."

"Well, I told him I was leaving. I'll get out now and hunt another job."

"Oh, say, Cal, I hate that! I'll miss you awfully. I'm mortal sorry it happened, darn his picters!" Rosalie had the air of a person who keeps a cross dog and is apologising for its having tried to bite someone. "Believe me, I told Bill a few things when I found this hat. He swore up and down that nothing really happened, only you got mad when he sort of made a little love to you, and ran off like a crazy thing before he could explain or apologise. The monumental jackass! And me ageing a hundred years a minute all day yesterday for fear you'd go to the police—as you've got a perfect right to do." She still looked at me apprehensively.

"I'm not going to anybody about it," I repeated. "I've enough to do hunting up another job. You don't know of anything for me, do you, Rosie?"

"I wish I did, Cal," kind old Rosalie answered. "It's the dull season. I'm afraid you'll have a hard time getting anything."

She was digging down into her pocket with her good hand, the little helpless member swinging. I knew what she was up to.

"Now, Rosie, you can't lend me money," I said. "and you needn't try. Really—I don't need it."

"Honestly? Cross your heart? You *would* come to me if you had to have it? I could spare you fifteen bones—as easy as not."

Bless her gallant heart! The shoes she had on were all bulged at the side and shabby; and Rosalie had cause to be vain of her pretty, small feet.

"Yes, yes," I assured her. hastily. "But I don't need it—and I'm not going to."

She eyed me wistfully as I did up the hat along with the things I had come for, and to the last kept saying that I was to come to her if I got in a pinch. I left my note of resignation at the "Clarion" office and went up to the Phipps Business College. They also reminded me that it was midsummer, but they listed my name and promised to throw anything my way that they could. I didn't chance to see anything of Harvey while I was in the building, but I was ready for him; I was still so mad that if I'd met him that morning, he'd have got a piece of my mind.

I went on to the employment agencies, one after the other, and found them, as I had a year before, overrun with the signing up of hop-pickers. I began to be attracted by the idea of just packing up some rough clothes and taking Boy and going up into the Hopfields district to pick. It was only a few hours' run; Corinth, where Boy used to go with Mrs. Eccles, was right in the middle of it. Mrs. Eccles's son-in-law had been a buyer and shipper; she said he had worked in pretty nearly every capacity you could imagine on a hop ranch. She thought I could do it. Las Palmas, the biggest one there—indeed, the biggest in the world—was the ranch I selected in my own mind, because on a place of that size and wealth the arrangements and accommodations would be sure to be exceptionally good. I definitely decided on Las Palmas as a

last resort. It would at least make a break—get us out of San Vicente for a while.

There was work for Mr. Dale that evening, and though I hated to bring the question up because I thought it might look like asking him to pay me, I decided to get from him a letter of recommendation; that ought to be valuable to me in San Vicente anyhow.

He was now lecturing in the summer school, but the work to-night was a magazine article. He met me differently; he was too much of a gentleman to allude to Saturday night's adventure, but surely that was what made the change. On my own part, so much had come and gone since then that I had quit thinking about it till I saw him, and something odd in his eyes when he looked at me—a kind of waked-up expression, as though he had just discovered that I was a human being—brought it all back.

The work went well; we kept at it till after midnight. Then, as he came close to the machine on one of his turns back and forth through the room, he suddenly stopped, picked up the cover and set it over the keys.

"There," he said, with unusual geniality, "I could finish to-night—but I won't quite kill you this time."

"I'm perfectly willing to go on—if you want to," I offered.

"No, no." He was more smiling than I had ever seen him; I realised how much better he appeared, physically; his colour was good now and his eye bright; he looked a sound, well man. "It's too late for any more work to-night," he told me, as I continued to sit at the machine rather helplessly.

"Is it too late for me to stay a little while?" I began. "I wanted to——" I hesitated for a word, and he broke in on me:

"Of course not. It isn't as late as Saturday night."

He was laughing as he spoke, but I saw he rather expected me to say something about my curious call on him.

I didn't intend to explain how it happened—Rosalie was right; the less I talked about that, the better. A little knot of manzanita roots smouldered in the open fireplace; the two chairs that he and Dr. Rush usually occupied sat in their accustomed places before the hearth. As I remained silent, trying to get my request into shape, Mr. Dale came across, took me by the shoulders, and put me into the doctor's chair. It was a kindly, cordial action, and I remember thinking in a bewildered way that he had never treated me the least bit like that before.

"There," he said; "are you comfortable? May I take this one—and smoke?"

He got a cigar and established himself opposite me. I sat and stared at him so long that he finally burst out laughing.

"Well?" he prompted; and when I still didn't say anything, it came once more: "Well—what do you think of this man—now that you've met him for the first time?"

"I think——" To my own immense surprise, I choked so that I couldn't go on. I felt the tears in my eyes, and was desperately anxious that he shouldn't notice. I had had a hard day, and this almost affectionate tone from a person who had always treated me more like a useful piece of furniture than a living creature upset me. I wanted to pour out a heartfelt of thanks to him—to tell him what he'd been to me—the mere kindling touch of his personality, for his advice and suggestions had never been given very lavishly or warmly. He just sat there with an unlit cigar between his fingers and laughed at me. Suddenly—and I couldn't have been more surprised if the chair he sat in had taken life and done something of the sort—he leaned forward and picked up my hand.

"Do they get tired?" he asked, spreading my fingers out on his palm. "I look at them sometimes and remember that they've been doing the same thing all day—and I wonder how you can keep it up."

"That's what I wanted to stay and—speak to you—about," I faltered, in some embarrassment.

"Oh—it was something you had to speak to me about?" He repeated my words. He remained leaning forward, and he looked even more alert; but he dropped my hand and waited for what I had to say.

"I'm leaving the 'Clarion'——" I began.

"Why?" He got up suddenly, reached to the mantel for matches and lit his cigar. "I think you're making a mistake." He threw his burnt-out match in the ashes. He didn't wait for my explanation, but went right on. "Nearly all beginners get the idea they can write because they can appreciate what is written; they do some stuff; their injudicious friends praise it; so they fly off in a great flame of enthusiasm and try to get paid for work before they've learned the A B C of their trade. Newspaper training knocks that sort of notion out of young idiots. You're making a mistake to leave the 'Clarion.'"

"I had no choice in the matter," I said, chilled.

"That's too bad." His tone softened. I saw he thought I had lost my place; well—let it go—what difference did it make?

"So," I got around to it at last, "I wanted to ask you for a written recommendation—if you feel like giving me one."

"I certainly do." He was emphatic, but somehow he had lost all the warmth of manner with which he had put me in the doctor's chair. He seemed to question me with his glance. I wondered what he wanted or expected of me that was different. He turned to the little fireside desk, pulled forward a sheet of paper, and began to write, remarking:

"It had better be all in my own script. I believe that's the etiquette for notes of the sort."

When he finished and blotted it I was on my feet. As I held out my hand for it, he twisted round and stared.

"Is that all?" he asked, and his tone sounded angry.

"Why, yes," I faltered. "I had thought of going out to the college with this. You wouldn't mind, would you? I—if—— It's the dull season for business, and I thought I might get some work out there."

With a slow motion he took up the cigar, which he had been keeping alight by an occasional puff as he wrote. He sat and smoked with his back to me. It was uncivil. Finally he said:

"If you go around San Vicente College hunting a job, you'd better leave my name out of it."

It came like a slap in the face. Bewildered, I reached forward to put the note down on the desk beside him. At my movement he whirled, but when he saw what I was doing, got to his feet and stood drawn up, looking me over.

"My recommendation won't do you any good out there," he had the grace to explain, when he saw how he had hurt me. "I'm leaving them. They call it breach of contract—it was only a verbal agreement—and choose to be very angry."

"Are you going East?" I asked, mechanically—not that I had any interest in knowing. Something in the last three minutes had told me that Frank Hollis Dale would never be any further from me than he was at that minute. Half the girth of the globe didn't matter. An inexplicable something had come up that separated him from anything in my world as completely as though I had never known him—and I had no idea what it was. I left the note on the table and was starting to the door when he answered my question.

"Going East? Of course I am. Why would I stay here—when I've got my health again? Ugh—it will be a relief to get back to where there are people with some sense in their heads!" I wondered at the bitter energy of his speech.

"Well," I said, feebly, "good-bye."

He had faced around toward the mantel, and was setting a framed photograph in place there.

"Good-bye," he said, without turning his head. I went out and shut the door.

Next morning I could see from my window that there were open boxes and excelsior down by the bungalow porch. While I was dressing I heard hammering from that direction. He had begun the first packing. Somehow it cut awfully little figure with me. Even his disagreeable behaviour of last night seemed trivial at the side of the question as to whether I could or could not get a place. I was a little sorry I had gone away and left his letter of recommendation. I wondered whether, when he got over his ugly spell—I couldn't yet decide what he had been mad about—he'd be good enough to mail it to me. I didn't see why the college authorities shouldn't value his recommendation, even if they were angry at him.

That day was more discouraging than the first. Still I did find one or two places where they thought they could do something for me in the course of a month or six weeks—when business picked up in the fall. I got on the track of a stenographer's job at the Kalama mines, and thought enough of it to run up there and investigate. I found the position already filled. The trip kept me away over night.

When I got into San Vicente, about nine in the morning, I stopped at the Phipps school before going out to the house.

I met Harvey in the hallway. His look in my direction would have been funny if it hadn't been aggravating. He sort of started forward as if he was going to shake hands and try to talk to me; then drew back, scared looking, and finally stood while I went past him. Rather to my surprise, I found that Pop Phipps had a day's work for me, so I stayed right there. When I got home that evening I found that Mrs. Eccles had been telephoning me since

noon the day before, and had said she would ring up again at five o'clock. It made me uneasy, so that I stayed down in the hall with my hat on, waiting. At five sharp the 'phone rang. The first sound of Mrs. Eccles's voice would have told me that something was the matter. She wanted me to come right out to Las Reudas; Boy was sick; and for a while I couldn't understand where he was. Finally I made out that he'd been taken over to the Watkins's.

"Are you 'phoning from there?" I asked, and the answer came back quickly:

"No, *ma'am*. I am not at Mrs. Watkins's. I am using Mrs. Pendleton's telephone. My goodness, Mrs. Baird—where have you been? You want to get out here just as quick as ever you can."

I didn't stop to find how Boy came to be at Delia's, but got straight to Las Reudas. Mrs. Eccles was waiting for me on the street; she had evidently been uncertain as to which route I might take, and stood where she could see me coming from either direction. She was so worked up that, for the first time, I was really scared.

"Is he very sick? How is it that he is at the Watkins's?" I asked, as we almost ran along the sidewalk.

With a great deal of "I says to her" and "She says to me," Mrs. Eccles began to explain how Delia had been mad about the new orders that Boy wasn't to go there any more, declaring such behaviour showed that I wasn't fit to have the child. Boy would run away and go over there, and Mrs. Eccles had fusses with Delia when she went to bring him back. Yesterday he had eaten something there that didn't agree with him. When Mrs. Eccles missed him, and ran over, Delia had already got him into bed, and was sending for her own doctor and for Harvey.

"Her own doctor?" I echoed. "You ought to have called Dr. Rush when you couldn't get me." I ran across the porch to ring the bell.

"There, that's right—blame me!" said Mrs. Eccles, be-

ginning to cry. "I did my best to stop Mrs. Watkins from sending for Dr. Ballard. I told her Jawn didn't need strong medicine. Ballard always gives dreadful strong medicine to children. And I've been telephoning and trying to get you ever since. I've been nearly crazy."

"Never mind; I'm here now," I said, punching at the bell.

"Well, you're needed. Mrs. Watkins wouldn't listen to a word from me. She'd hardly let me go in the room to see him. Her and Ballard had it all their own way. I know they've give him a lot of stuff; he just lays there like a dead child, and Mrs. Watkins keeps pouring the medicine into him—I know she does. He wouldn't be like that if she didn't."

"I wish I could get word to Dr. Rush," I said, and jabbed the bell again.

"Why, my goodness! He's right there at Mrs. Pendleton's this minute, if he ain't left. She's got one of her nervous spells, and they can't find Pendleton, and she thinks the sun rises and sets in Dr. Rush."

Delia opened the door to us at the moment. She had on an old bathrobe of Harvey's, her hair pugged up any way, and she looked as if she had been losing sleep or crying. She sort of flattened back at sight of me, as though something had hit her on the forehead.

"Why—Foncie!" she said, but she stood still in the door and didn't ask me in.

"I came to get Boyce," I told her, without any preliminaries.

"He's asleep now. You wouldn't want to disturb him when he's asleep," she said, still keeping the knob in her hand. It was almost as though she would have shut the door in my face.

"I guess he is asleep!" Mrs. Eccles cried, and her voice began to be hysterical. "With all that stuff you're giving him!" That reminded me.

"Run quick and get Dr. Rush," I said, as I pushed past Delia.

"Do you want to insult Dr. Ballard?" Dele called after me as I was running up the stairs.

"Yes," I answered, not knowing at all what I said.

She made no move to follow me as I rushed straight to her door. Inside, Delia's own bed had been pulled out into the middle of the room, away from all draughts. The shades were drawn so low that at first I could hardly see what lay on it—Boy, his eyes rolled up, his face sunken and greenish, grayish white, his whole body rigid and motionless except for the two little thumbs, that were moving rhythmically, regularly.

When my eyes got accustomed to the dimness I saw that Fairy lay at his feet, an old dress skirt of Delia's under her to protect the white spread. I didn't disturb her as I knelt there. Boy must be dying. I faced that thought during the few moments before I heard Dr. Rush in the hall below. He called to me to come down, and when I stopped halfway on the stairs, he said, looking up at me but speaking rather to Delia, who was beside him:

"I can't interfere with a patient of Dr. Ballard's."

"He's not Dr. Ballard's patient," I cried. "I never called Dr. Ballard. I've called you. Oh, come quick—I'm afraid he's dying." That brought Dr. Rush right up the stairs. Delia and Mrs. Eccles came along with him. We all stood around like frightened children. The first thing he said was:

"Phew! Open these windows, and take that dog away." Then, as Mrs. Eccles was gathering Fairy off the bed, he added, testily, "What in the world did you bring a dog in here for?"

"Ask Mrs. Watkins," she said, resentfully. "I didn't have anything to do with it."

"I had the doggie in to see if Jack would know her,"

Delia defended. "And he did; he knew her perfectly this morning—perfectly."

The shades were run up now; Mrs. Eccles shut Fairy out; and the doctor went across and examined his patient. He asked for the medicine that was being given, glanced at the bottle Delia handed him, sniffed at it, gave her a keen look, and said:

"Where's the other one?"

"It's only—there's hardly a full dose of the other left," Delia babbled. "It was only to be given if he was restless. He isn't restless any more."

"No," said the doctor, dryly, "he wouldn't be after you'd administered the better part of a bottle of soothing syrup."

"It was not soothing syrup." Delia tried to be dignified. "It's a regular prescription." And she got the bottle from the bathroom shelf.

"Huh!" grunted the doctor, smelling its cork; "chlorodyne! How close did you give these doses? When did you begin?"

"Why, last night." Delia's air of authority was giving way. "It worked splendidly; he went right to sleep after the first dose. But he didn't sleep long, and I was sure he needed his rest, and so I—so I——"

"So you kept on giving it to him. How many times did you repeat it?"

"I don't know. I—just till he slept sound. Dr. Ballard told me not to wake him up to give him medicine, so I—— Just till he slept real sound."

Dr. Rush's angry eye measured the distance down in the bottle.

"Well, madam," he said, "you may thank your stars you haven't quite killed this child."

"Sir!" Delia drew herself up. "Dr. Ballard's my physician, and that's his medicine you've got in your hand. I'll not stay here to——"

"What makes the thumbs move that way? It's horrible!" Mrs. Eccles burst out, uncontrollably, tears running down her face.

"Narcotic poisoning—morphine, Indian hemp, and prussic acid, with chloral," said the doctor, shortly. "This stuff has all those in it."

"It has not! I told you that was Dr. Ballard's medicine you're talking that way about!" Delia whimpered at him, took another look at Boy, then fairly ran out of the room.

"Tell me the truth, Dr. Rush," I said, and my lips were dry. "Is he—going to die?"

"No, certainly not." He scowled and shook his head. "We'll pull him through all right. You'll have to see that he gets no more chlorodyne."

He took out his pocket case and prepared a hypodermic, explaining to me:

"I want to get this caffein into him as promptly as possible—it's an antidote for the opium. He'll sleep—but a good deal more naturally—for some time. Give him all the water he'll take, keep the air in the room fresh. Use a hot water bag if he's in pain—and 'phone to me any minute you need me."

I realised while he was speaking that I couldn't stay there in the Watkins house and nurse Boy.

"Could he be moved?" I asked.

Dr. Rush threw up his head and stared at me.

"Oh—you're willing to move him?" He nodded. "That's good—just the thing. A rush of fresh air in his face is the very antidote for him. Get something warm to wrap him up and I'll take the two of you in in my machine right now."

At that, I said, blankly:

"Where shall I go? They won't let me keep him at the Poinsettia."

"You can come to my house," said Mrs. Eccles. "I'll



I RAN AND GOT HOLD OF DR. RUSH'S ARM AND HE
SAID TO ME OVER AND OVER: "ALL RIGHT. I
WON'T HIT HIM AGAIN"

sleep on a cot and give you my bed. I——” But Dr. Rush had already gone down to the telephone. He came back in a few minutes, saying:

“It’s all right. We’re going to the Poinsettia.”

“Foncie!” Delia overhauled us below as we were carrying Boy out, wrapped in one of her down puffs. “I feel just awful about the way you’re taking this. Hod and I meant so well by the child, and you seem to think——”

“Oh, Delia”—I couldn’t bear to listen any longer—“what difference does it make how I take it or what I think? If Boyce dies——”

“I don’t see that it will be my fault.” Delia was finally in tears. “We sent for the best physician in town as soon as he seemed to be the least bit ailing. I was up with him again and again last night—and Hod, too. Then here you come and drag him away from the house as if we were murderers, and take him out and jounce him around this way! You’ll be the one to blame if—if anything happens.”

Dr. Rush put me into the seat of his runabout and arranged Boy on my lap as exactly as if we had been alone. Mrs. Eccles had cut across lots to get a bundle of clothes ready for us to pick up as we passed. I never looked to see if Delia was there, though the curt lifting of Dr. Rush’s hat told me she was. I hadn’t eyes or attention for anything at the moment, for as we drove away the cool air and swift motion roused Boy, and, to my unspeakable relief, he looked up and knew me. He sank back immediately, but his face looked better.

“That caffen’s getting hold,” the doctor said. “The drive’s doing him good. I thought it would. We’ll get through all right. Dale said they’d have the room ready for you at the Poinsettia.”

“Mr. Dale?”

“Yes. I got Frank to ask. I knew Mrs. Thrasher wouldn’t refuse him anything.”

We went ahead in silence for quite a while after that. I was studying Boy's little pinched face, that seemed to gather some colour from the warmth of a wonderful after-glow that streamed on us out of the west. I don't know why I should have said anything to the doctor, but all sorts of things come boiling to the surface at such a time; I found myself telling him, first, of Mr. Dale's seeming to get mad at me the other night, and then of how good he'd been to me when I was locked out. He listened, asking an occasional question, curiously; and I ran on and on about it; I hardly noticed what I was saying. Then Boy opened his eyes again. This time he said, "Muvver," and I forgot everything else in that.

The room was ready for us when we got to the Poinsettia. Everybody was good to me. Miss Creevey brought a hot water bag, because she said she was afraid I wouldn't have any and the doctor would call for one. Mrs. Thrasher herself came up to look at Boy and offer help, while the Martins were as upset as if he'd been a relative. It was really like coming home. Boy looked about and appeared to know where he was when we got him into the room.

Mrs. Tipton sat with me nearly all that first night. Boy didn't need us, but I couldn't have slept anyway, and we got to talking, so that it was after three o'clock when she went downstairs. I got my first insight into the real woman there was in this Virginia lady. Nothing was said between us directly as to Joe Ed, but she told me a good deal about his father, and his grandfather, and how some money had been tied up for him when he was a baby. He would get it now in a few months when he came of age. She hoped it might start him in life.

Money—oh!—I could see that was what Addie and her lawyer were after. Mrs. Tipton knew it, and wanted me to understand, but she made no plea or defence; she was too proud and brave for that. I wondered if she had

heard from Joe Ed lately. I hadn't. As we two mothers sat there in the small hours, I looked at my own son, and wished I might be able to do something for her and hers. Addie was gone from the Poinsettia this long time. She was working at the cafeteria in the Cronin Building. I used to see her handsome, sullen face there sometimes.

I could never forget Dr. Rush for the way he pulled Boy through that terrible dosing—there had been no real illness to recover from. I know it was the doctor's faithful work that put the child on his feet so quickly. It was only three days that he lay there sick in my room. I didn't give much thought to anything else. Dr. Rush came in several times each day, always saying that he just ran in because he was at Dale's anyhow. Mr. Dale himself I didn't see to speak to, though I got glimpses of him from the window. And when the third day came, and Boy seemed about as well as ever, I decided to put my pride in my pocket, and get that letter of recommendation before Mr. Dale left. I would try it out at San Vicente College, and if I failed there, go on with the child to Hopfields. I left Boy in the front hall, with a lot of magazines and a box of coloured crayons. As I went out the door I saw Dr. Rush's machine and knew he would be at the bungalow. I was glad. It would relieve any possible awkwardness.

Before I got to the bungalow I could hear the two men's voices, speaking loud—quarrelling, it would have sounded like, if I hadn't known their arguments of old. I stopped on the porch—why, surely they were quarrelling! As I stood there, question and answer followed each other like an exchange of shots. First Mr. Dale's voice soared out, cold, bitter:

"Well, was it she that thought I'd ask favours for her?"

"Don't make any difference. It's certainly up to you to do her favours. Aren't you under plenty of obligation to that poor thing?"

"Obligations—obligations?" It was a stutter of rage. "Not as many as she'd have put me under—willingly—gladly."

"Don't tell me she ran after you—it's not so," Dr. Rush roared. "I don't meddle with any man's business—but that much I know. Wasn't I here with you evening after evening? Didn't I see the two of you together?"

Could they be speaking of me? I stepped into the room. Mr. Dale was facing the door. His eye went through me as though I had been thin air. He was positively shining with fury. I had never seen him look so handsome.

"I don't know what you call it," he said, coolly. "Saturday night she came down to my sleeping porch in the small hours. If that's not so, she's here to deny it."

Dr. Rush never looked at me. What a mercy that I had happened to tell him all about that miserable Saturday night! He walked up close to Mr. Dale and said:

"Frank—I'll give you one more chance to do the decent thing. What did she come to you for?"

"At two o'clock in the morning? What would you suppose?"

"Be careful—I know all about it."

"Oh!" Mr. Dale stepped back a little and drew himself up, glaring at the other. "Oh—you're the man she was out with—eh?"

"You're a liar!"

Word and blow came together. I had stood flattened back against the wall by the door, helpless, staring; but when I saw Dr. Rush's fist shoot out and Mr. Dale go crashing down in the middle of the floor, I shut my eyes.

When I opened them again he was still lying there, full length, but moving to get up. He hadn't been hard enough hit to hurt him very badly, though I guessed he'd have a black eye from it later, but he'd been caught in just such a way that the blow overbalanced him.

Dr. Rush's face was a study. I think he was sorry, but,

most of all, he looked astonished. I ran and got hold of his arm, and he said to me over and over :

"All right. I won't hit him again." Then, as he saw Mr. Dale wasn't killed, "Come—let's get out of here. My Lord!—what a fool temper—a doctor mauling his patients around! Come. Come."

We went as far as the tunnel, and then I had to run back and get his hat. Mr. Dale was gone from the room; I could hear him in his bedroom beyond, bathing his face. I never saw him again. I had forgotten the letter I came after.

When I got back to the doctor I found him still so disturbed that we walked up and down the tunnel a few turns. Under the circumstances, I asked a question or two.

"Don't you see?" the doctor said. "It's a pretty plain case. Dale's the most arrogant devil where women are concerned that I ever knew. They do run after him and make fools of themselves about him."

"Oh, yes," I said; "I've seen that, but did you think that I——"

He didn't let me finish.

"No. You behaved all right, and like a sensible little woman, always."

"Then what——"

Again he interrupted me.

"Oh, it just happened that that monumental egotist in there got to feeling pretty good and would have liked somebody to make love to him. You got him to help you in through the window that night—it suggested the idea that you'd be the one." The red spark of fighting fire had died out of Dr. Rush's brown eyes. He turned his hat in his hands thoughtfully. "The evening you asked him for the recommendation, he gave you the chance—and you didn't come across. I realised the whole situation when you first told me about it. That infernal pride of his would make

him say anything to save his face." He chuckled a little ruefully. "I'm afraid I changed his map." He looked down at his knuckles, shook his big shoulders, and sighed, "There goes a lifelong friendship—so far as I'm concerned."

To think that I, by miserable chance, should have been the wedge that split such a friendship! I hadn't a word to tell him how sorry I was. If I had known where to borrow a camping outfit—or buy it outright, if it hadn't cost too much—I'd have been for starting up to the Hopfields district the next morning. As it was, I made up my mind not to be a bit longer about getting off than I had to.

CHAPTER XVI

A CRY FOR HELP

APPARENTLY luck was with me in this matter of getting away from San Vicente. As soon as I spoke of the hop-picking plan to Mrs. Tipton she offered to lend me what I needed from the Poinsettia's camping outfit. We went down into the basement and selected the things—blankets, mattress bag, cooking vessels, agate dishes and iron knives and forks, and a little camp stove. They all packed neatly into the big bag, and I could check them on my ticket.

It was a weight off my mind—I felt fairly gay when I took Boy downtown and bought him stout shoes, another suit of Can't-bust-'ems, and a wide straw hat. He could hardly wait to show the outfit to Mr. Martin, with whom he was full partners these days. The old couple were entertaining my son at dinner in their room that night; she'd been having trouble with her foot and didn't come down to the table. It was funny to see how much interest the idle women in the Poinsettia took in this new enterprise of mine. I suppose it attracted their attention as being something doing. They discussed it with me solemnly; it might have been the choice of a life career from the weight they put on it. Several of them contributed small gifts, and all of them gave good advice.

Late in the afternoon, when I'd pretty well got everything done, I left Boy with the Martins and went downtown once more. I must register my new address with Pop Phipps in case anything turned up for me. I would go around by the railway station after doing that, buy my ticket for to-morrow's journey, and attend to the checking of my baggage. All day luck held. Coming down in the

elevator at the Cronin Building I met Addie with—of all people—little Mr. Bates. Of course, they both worked in the building, but it was funny to see them together, and funnier still when he asked if they could have a word with me—if *they* could! I said, "Why, certainly," and we turned into a little side hall where we were fairly private.

"I suppose you know I'm a member of the bar of San Vicente County, Mrs. Baird?" he opened up.

I hadn't known it, but I nodded.

"I'm handling Miss Schoonover's suit." He jerked his head toward Addie, who stood at his shoulder, her feet planted a little wide, looking like a thunder-cloud. "She's just informed me—and she ought to have done so at first—that you——" He broke off significantly, and Addie spoke without looking up:

"Aw, I told him—about your ketchin' me that night."

"Yes," said Bates, "but, Mrs. Baird, you certainly wouldn't—you wouldn't——"

When I failed to fill out his pause for him with an assurance of what I would not do, he finished hastily:

"In short, are the defendants aware of your knowledge? Are they going to call you as a witness?"

I looked past him at the girl. She had reddened darkly, and didn't meet my eye, but kept staring angrily at her lawyer.

"I'm very sorry for you, Addie," I said, as though the two of us had been alone.

"That's right—that's right," Bates put in briskly. "I told her your sympathy would be with her. Now—er—could you, perhaps, help us to the whereabouts of the defendant?"

Again I spoke to Addie as though her officious lawyer had not been present:

"Nobody knows where Joe Ed is. His mother doesn't. He's knocking about the world somewhere, under a false name probably, picking up a living any way he can. You

know what that means to a boy of his age—and disposition.”

“I can’t help it,” the girl burst out. She turned on Bates when he would have spoken. “Shut your head!” she ordered. “You put me up to this. When you was trying to get me to sue you was mighty polite.”

Bates cut a stealthy eye round in my direction before he said sharply to his client:

“You talk too much. If I’m to handle your case, you keep still.”

“What’s the use? It was Joe Ed Tipton or nobody with you; and anybody but a fool could see that Mrs. Baird ain’t on our side.”

“Now you *have* spilled the beans!” cried Bates. “It’s good-night, nurse. Mrs. Baird, I beg you to believe that I didn’t know the nature of this suit—when—when—ah——”

“That’ll about hold you,” Addie interrupted, fiercely. Then, turning to me, “There won’t be no suit. You can tell the Mrs.” And she walked away down the hall.

I left Bates in the middle of superfluous explanations that this wasn’t his case anyhow; that the firm merely allowed him the handling of certain—ah—certain—— Had him appear in business they would have been ashamed of, I suppose. I got my car and went home.

There was a wonderful sunset that evening; clear, glowing, it welled from the west, flowed through the streets, and seemed to drown out the city, since somehow a town all flooded with sunset light is not a town any more. At the house it was that quiet hour just before dinner. My heart was at peace as I let myself into the Poinsettia for what might be the last time. Once more luck was with me; I caught Mrs. Tipton in the empty hall, just getting upstairs to change her dress for dinner. I gave her my news in a very few words. She just stood there above me and looked at me with swimming eyes, though her deli-

cate, short-chinned little face still held its look of smiling reserve.

"I won't thank you—in words," she said, under her breath, turned abruptly and went on up the stairs—the frail, brown reed of a woman, stoical as a big, strong, dignified man, and as shy of making a scene, or showing any emotion. I was fairly bubbling with gladness that it was I who had been the one to bring her such relief as had looked out of those swimming eyes of hers. There came comically into my mind that ridiculous saying of Joe Ed's: "'Well that chore's chored'—as the Yankee woman said when she poisoned her husband."

Smiling to myself at the recollection, I glanced around to gather any of Boy's scattered belongings, and was retrieving bud'n from under the desk, when the telephone rang. Mrs. Tipton was gone; there was so much clatter in the kitchen, where dinner was being prepared, that they wouldn't have heard the bell there. I stopped, the toy in my hand, and answered the call.

"Is that the Poinsettia?" The voice on the wire was very faint.

"Yes."

"Mrs. Baird—if—if Mrs. Baird is in the house, I wish to speak to her."

"This is Mrs. Baird."

"What?" Silence for a moment; then, "Callie—is that you? Callie!"

The voice sounded queer—sort of strangled—but I thought I knew it, and answered:

"Yes, it's Callie."

"Are you—are there people in the hall there with you?"

"There's nobody, but I can——"

"No, no! And don't use my name when you answer. If anybody comes into the hall while you're talking, be careful what you say. Listen."

"I'm listening."

"Go to Mrs. Tipton and get the key to my room. Tell her—tell her you need some sewing things—or—anything you please. Get the key."

The voice failed.

"What—what shall I do with it?" I hesitated. "Bring it to you?"

"No. Listen." The tone was more collected; this was plainly Eugenia Chandler, giving carefully thought out directions. "Get a blue taffeta dress from the bathroom hooks. It's an old one you never saw—dark blue. The little black hat that goes with it—that's on the shelf above. Put them in my light bag. Get them to me as quick as you can. Wait. Listen. Shoes and stockings—black. Not shoes—pumps. And hairpins—a bunch of hairpins. Don't forget them. Callie—you've not gone? You're listening?"

"Yes, yes," I answered. "I'm to take them—— Where are you?"

"At the Union Station. Bring the things here. Don't tell anybody. Don't let anybody see you."

At the Union Station—I had been there myself half an hour ago, buying my ticket! I raised my head and looked around the hall. In ten or fifteen minutes the place would be full of folks coming down to dinner.

"If you could wait till dark——" I was beginning, but the queer, choking voice cut in on me with quick terror:

"I can't wait. Callie—I can't more than hold out till you get here."

"All right—all right," I hurried. "I'll do my best. I can be down there in twenty minutes."

"You'll find me in the women's room," came the last word, just before I hung up and took the stairs at a run.

When I tapped on Mrs. Tipton's door and asked for Miss Chandler's key, she took it off the ring and handed it to me without a word, though she drew an odd, deep little breath as she worked it free from among the others.

I didn't say that about the sewing to her. It seemed sort of unnecessary.

The blinds were down in Miss Chandler's room. At first I thought I'd raise them, and then I used the electric lights instead. As they flashed up I looked about me. I had never been in the place before when she was out of it. Now it was hard to associate that poor little, fugitive, strangled voice that had sent me here with this big, quiet, elegant security.

I ran into the bathroom. Garments fell in heaps as I clawed the blue dress and its wrap from back of them. The light bag was small. I had to cram unmercifully to get things in; but I couldn't carry that heavy suit-case. All the time I kept listening for footsteps going downstairs. Could I make it? Could I get back through the hall before they gathered there? I flew for the stockings and pumps—and knocked down a bottle of scented ammonia. The smell followed me; it was all over the place; but I couldn't stop. Dress, hat, wrap, shoes and stockings—had I everything? Yes. Hairpins! I grabbed a box of them from the dresser.

As soon as I stepped outside the door I heard voices below. The front way was cut off. I took the back stairs, got as far as the turn at the kitchen door and reconnoitred. Addie's place had been filled by a negro man, husband of Julia, the laundress. It must have been Orma's afternoon out, for Julia herself was helping dish dinner. As I stood wondering what I'd better do, Mrs. Tipton came through the swinging doors from the dining-room. Without seeming to glance toward the stairway, she spoke instantly in her little fluting voice:

"Julia, go in and finish setting the table."

"I done set——" the negress began.

"Change the napkins."

"I done changed——" Julia tried again, but her mistress interrupted:

"Put the plain satin damask ones on. Be quick. It's time to ring the bell."

The woman went, looking bewildered. Mrs. Tipton turned to her cook.

"Everett, serve that meat on a larger platter. Come, reach the big one from the top shelf of the pantry."

With that uncanny intuition of hers, she had cleared my way. As soon as the man's back was turned, while Mrs. Tipton herself stood in the pantry door looking after and directing him, I slipped through the kitchen and was out.

I took a street car down—it would be quicker than to walk. Once among people going about their every-day affairs, the whole thing seemed like a dream. If I hadn't had the bag in my hand, I should have believed that it was one. I ran from the car into the station. It was all quiet. The last train must have come in nearly an hour ago. The place was almost deserted. My footsteps sounded loud as I crossed to the women's room. The janitress, at work in a little cubby where brooms and brushes were kept, looked out at me and then went on with whatever she was doing.

The women's room was vacant. No—a heap of garments on a chair over in its further corner stirred. I went halting across. It was a woman, sitting humped, bowed, sort of fallen-together-looking, in a motor cloak and hood. She raised her head slowly.

I can feel yet, whenever I think of it, the shock that went over me. I don't know what I had expected. I ought to have been prepared, it seemed. Yet I came near crying out. This was Eugenia Chandler. She looked ten years older. The flesh seemed sunk in on the bones of her face, withered, somehow, as though a blast of destruction had blown on it; her carefully tended skin was a dirty grey with big black circles around those strange light eyes of hers that fixed themselves on what I had brought.

"Is everything in there?" she whispered, without using my name.

"Yes—I——"

"Don't speak so loud. Is the maid noticing? Did she see you come in?"

"She saw me. But she's not looking now; she's busy at her work."

Miss Chandler came up a little out of her chair. While she seemed to be neither standing nor sitting she took the bag from me.

"You wait here," she breathed. "Don't stir. I won't be long."

She moved then, going forward very slowly, and "scrooched," as the children say. I stood and stared. It was like a nightmare. Why didn't she stand up and walk? What was the matter?

She passed behind the little shuttered door which would give the only security possible in such a place; I heard its fastenings click. Then, for a moment, in the open space below the shutter—below the edge of the big motor coat—I saw her feet—bare—thrust into a dirty pair of pink, quilted-satin bedroom slippers.

After that I stood rigid, my face turned away, hearing the sound of her swift movements as she dressed in the things I had brought. I couldn't think. I didn't want to try. I only ached to get out of this nightmare. Suddenly the little quick sounds of her dressing stopped for an instant. There was a listening silence; then came her voice, startled, yet guarded:

"Callie! Are you there?"

"Right here. I haven't moved."

"Well, don't. I'm nearly ready."

Again silence, except for the click of pump heels on the floor, the continuous rustle of clothing. Then:

"Callie! Is the maid looking?"

"No; she's not in sight."

At that she opened the door and came out, changed beyond recognition, wearing the blue taffeta, carrying the bag (into which she must have crowded the motor coat and hood), her motor veil tied over the small black hat so that no one would have known her except by her figure. Even that didn't look as usual, and when she saw me noticing she said, whisperingly:

"I ought to have told you—underwear and corsets. Never mind. We'll get—home."

I hadn't brought any gloves, either. It seemed very strange to see her in street wear with bare hands. She drew them up in the sleeves of the wrap, and I carried the bag.

I hope never again to experience the feeling that grew stronger and stronger in me as this muffled figure and I left the women's room. I gave one scared glance at the janitress, and thought she seemed surprised. We went across the main room, and so to the street.

I got to feeling afraid of the thing that walked beside me. I couldn't see its face. It didn't speak. Terror came out to me from it. It went along feebly, as though it had hard work to get one foot before the other, and trying to hide its bare hands. When I wanted to get a taxi there came but the single word:

"Street car."

We went and stood on that corner where I had waited in the dawn with Boy, my first morning in San Vicente. There were more people in the street than in the station, she had spoken at last; I was a little relieved. Then, as we waited, she caught my arm and whispered:

"My stocking's coming down. Stand in front of me."

I sheltered her with my own skirts and the bag. We were beside the woman who sells papers on that corner. Bending down so, Miss Chandler must have read a headline through her veil, for she said, as she straightened up:

"Buy one. Don't look at it. Fold it. Bring it along."

Our car came. I helped her on. The conductor was one I rode with often. He said good-evening as I paused to pay our fares. I wished he hadn't recognised me, but there was nothing to do about it. She sat beside me, seeming scarcely able to hold up her head. I thought she wasn't noticing, but when some folks got on a few blocks further uptown, she whispered:

"Callie, I know those people. They know me. Sit forward a little. Keep between us." It seemed an age before we got to our stopping place.

There was the good old Poinsettia just where it had been, on the corner of Arbolado and Fortieth, the very porch light—lavishly lit so soon—the shine from the dining-room windows, the sounds that showed people were in there at table, helped to bring a sense of reality. Why, this was really Miss Chandler here beside me. At the moment she pulled off her veil, and took the bag from my hand.

"Mustn't be seen together," she motioned. "Go in ahead."

"You can't carry it." She was already swaying on her feet.

"I can. Go on. Don't look back. Don't seem to be with me."

I went, very reluctantly. She staggered after, getting up the steps one at a time. The hall was empty. There was nobody to see our poor little comedy. I ran back, took the bag from her and got her up the stairs as quickly as I could. She was about at the end of her strength. Now that the brace of facing the street was gone, she seemed all relaxed, as though she would fall. I was afraid to let go of her while I unlocked the room door.

Inside, she made straight for the couch and fell on it face down, just as she was. She lay there breathing in long, shuddering sighs while I switched on the lights and got her hat off. She was ghastly—her very hair looked

dead. I saw she was in a chill, and ran to the bathroom for a hot-water bag. When I took off the shoes and stockings to put it to her feet I could have cried with pity to see the white flesh of her delicate ankles all scratched and broken, a great swollen bruise on one. Under her suit there was nothing but a silk nightgown, drabbled to the knees, torn, hitched up to make it short enough not to show below the dress edge. As I worked over her she spoke indistinctly, her mouth against the pillow:

"Lock the door."

I hurried across and had it open in my hand, getting at the key, when her voice came again:

"Listen. Do you hear anything down there? Is it all right?"

There were the sounds usual to the house during dinner; that was all. I told her so over my shoulder, locked the door, and then she said in a stronger tone than she had yet used,

"The paper."

I picked it up from the table where I'd thrown it, spread it out and saw in a great black headline across the front page, "ALVAH J. PENDLETON, JR., AND FINLEY BOGGS UNDER ARREST," with a sub-head, "ANTI-VICE WORKERS MAKE USE OF MANN WHITE SLAVE LAW TO TRAP OFFENDERS."

For a minute I didn't see anything more—just stared and stared. But she kept calling, "Well? what is it?" and I went over and held it out to her at arm's length. She wouldn't touch it, but caught at me and dragged me down a little so she could see.

"Read it—read it—read it!" she groaned.

There wasn't anything else to do. I stood there sort of cramped over in such a way that she might have seen the words if she had chosen, and read to her about the anti-vice campaign, the praises of our active prosecuting attorney, and how he'd got the best grand jury that San Vicente

County had had for a long time, and the biggest thing they'd done so far was to trail a party of law-breakers to the Pendleton camp and arrest young Pendleton and this other man, Boggs, for offences under the Mann White Slave Act—taking women across the state line for immoral purposes.

She would have it. I read on desperately through a lot of stuff about the woman companion of Boggs being held as a witness. She was spoken of as the gay wife of a San Francisco dentist, already co-respondent in a notorious divorce suit. Miss Chandler held to my wrist, and whenever I'd stop she shook it. Finally, far down the column, I came to mention of the other woman—"Pendleton's woman," they called her. She had got away—mysteriously escaped apparently at the very moment of the raid.

The grasp on my wrist—slim and cold, like a metal clamp—relaxed. With a sigh Miss Chandler sank back on her pillow. Her lids closed. What should I do? Call someone? Get water and bathe her face? As I hesitated her eyes flashed open for a moment and stared up in mine.

"Read the rest of it—all."

I began again. When I came to the statement that the detectives had got their information for the raid through an anonymous letter received by Mrs. Boggs, she said, lying there with those closed eyes,

"Judge Hoard."

"Do you mean that he wrote it?" I asked.

"Yes. Or had it written." She made the assertion in a strange, tired way as though it scarcely concerned her.

I hurried on through the details of Mrs. Pendleton's being in a nervous collapse, in the hands of her physician, unable to see anyone from the newspapers. Miss Chandler never opened her eyes, but I knew she listened. There was one paragraph that told how every move of the party had been watched from the first, how it was known that they came in with their Chinese cook and chauffeur from San

Francisco two days before the raid, kept indoors with the blinds down in the daytime and lit up and held high jinks at night, and on the night of the raid the detectives were hidden in the brush close around the camp from dark till the time they made the arrest. It brought from her the shuddering sob, "Oh, God!" That was all. I tried to stop then, but she just reached up and touched the paper, and I knew I had to go on.

She was stung into some sort of life when she heard about the chauffeur being in the pay of the detectives. He had kept in close touch with them by 'phone, watched the garage so that there could be no get-away in the machine, and was posted at the back door while two others forced the front door.

"The hound! I never trusted him," she whispered, and lay awhile looking straight before her.

I didn't move. The room was very quiet.

"Premonitions," she said abruptly. "I was sick all the evening—couldn't eat at dinner. I must have felt those devils out there in the bushes. I lay and listened to the others at their singing, and ragging to the phonograph. Then, afterward—in the dark—broad awake—hour after hour—waiting for something. When it came, I jumped—got hold of my slippers—motor cloak—hood. Purse—under my pillow. They hammered the front door. Chen So was coming from his room by the kitchen—to let them in. I ran past in the hall, dragging the coat on. He had a candle. He saw me."

She straightened herself on the couch. Her feet were beginning to get warm. The icy tension was relaxed.

"God bless that old Chinaman," she whispered. "He's a man! He looked at me with a perfectly wooden face, and said, 'I think one p'leece he stand at back door. Mebbe you go cellar way out. That way, p'leece he not see.'"

"I was on the cellar stairs when the detectives went in.

I heard the men over my head stamping and cursing, and that woman screaming. I ran up the side steps and stumbled out among some bushes. I was so near the back door I could see the man standing there. I dropped to my knees and crawled away."

She had crawled away on hands and knees, in her nightgown, a motor coat and bedroom slippers. Through what had those slippers gone before I saw them on her bare feet there in the station? What fierce courage had brought her in such a rig, from the Oregon mountains to lie here on her couch in San Vicente, nearly dead, to be sure, but here—safe? The chill had left her. Her cheeks began to flush and her eyes to gleam with fever. She raised herself on her elbow, and, catching at my skirts, said, bitterly:

"This is Judge Hoard's doing—from first to last. He thinks he's got me—that now, if I attempt to tell the truth about him—I'll be discredited. Oh, when I think of it, I could tear him to pieces with my fingers!"

Her violence scared me. Certainly this was a sick woman. Oughtn't she to have a doctor? Dinner was over. People were in the halls, but Miss Chandler didn't moderate her tone; she spoke loud. I was at my wits' end, hungry and worn out myself.

"You must be starved," I tried to divert her attention. "Let me get you something to eat."

She acted as if she hadn't heard. I thought I'd go anyhow and get her something, but when I opened the inner door there came a little tapping on the outer one, and there stood Mrs. Tipton with a covered tray, as steady a light in those brown eyes of hers as though we'd sent for her in the most ordinary way.

She walked in without the least explanation or question, set her tray on a stand, and while I locked the door she was beside Miss Chandler, laying hands on her, feeling her forehead with the born nurse's practised touch.

"Should we send for a doctor?" I whispered at her shoulder. But Miss Chandler heard and flamed out at me,

"Are you crazy? I don't need anything but a dose of morphine—and my dinner."

I looked across at Mrs. Tipton and raised my eyebrows inquiringly. She nodded.

"Get it for her, if you know where it is." And when I brought the vial of tablets from the bathroom medicine closet, she took it to the light and read the label, with Miss Chandler fretting at her,

"It's all right. I'm used to it. I take one when I can't sleep."

"You run down stairs and eat your own dinner, Mrs. Baird." Mrs. Tipton, having administered the tablet, was deftly spreading out the tray, and I saw from the look on Miss Chandler's face that she was going to eat. "Run along. Julia will give you something. Come back as soon as you're through."

I went then. Coming out of that room was like stepping from one world to another. There were the pleasant, mildly festive sounds of an evening at bridge being arranged. A door at the further end of the hall was open, and Miss Creevey called to Mrs. Tutt that she was bringing her new cards. Probably no one knew yet of Miss Chandler's coming, but I dodged down the back stairs so as to have to answer no questions.

In the kitchen Everett and his wife were at their meal, but they got up with that beautiful, smiling readiness that often astonishes me in servants, and brought mine to me in the dining-room. Julia at once agreed to go up and get Boy as soon as she could and put him to bed for me. She would have no trouble. He liked her. The hot food was comforting. I ate with unexpected appetite.

Back in the room once more, I found Mrs. Tipton had Miss Chandler all straightened up, put into a fresh gown,

lying in her bed, and was just finishing the braiding of her hair.

"I'm glad you were so quick," she chirped, composedly. "I'll have to go downstairs for half an hour. Then I'll relieve you." She packed her tray of emptied dishes deftly. "Did you like those timbales so well?" she cooed to the patient. "I'll have Everett make them for you again."

With her free hand she straightened the edge of Miss Chandler's pillows, then touched my shoulder so that I went with her to the door. There she spoke to me in a lowered tone as I was letting her out.

"Don't let her take another of the tablets. A quarter grain is all she ought to have. Keep her as quiet as you can. If she gets started talking the morphine will stimulate instead of putting her to sleep. It's better for her not to talk."

In this Virginia lady's colourless, detached manner there was neither curiosity nor indifference; it was simply and marvellously commonplace. I went back and sat down by Miss Chandler's bed. The minute we were alone she began to speak, rapidly and strongly, like a talking mechanism wound up to go just so long, a thing that couldn't be stopped except by violence.

"Callie—listen—Callie! I went on my hands and knees till I got out of that oak thicket. They were ransacking the house for me—I could hear them. I climbed the fence and ran. Up the canyon—their machine was in the road. I stumbled and fell. I fell and rolled. I got into a wood-road and ran and ran. I don't know how far. You can't tell—running in the dark that way. But I thought I'd gone miles when I heard bells and saw a light. A dog barked. It was a Spanish wood wagon from up in the hills, going across the range to the hotel—so I knew it must be nearly morning."

"Mrs. Tipton said you oughtn't to talk, dear." I drew

the covers smooth. "Could you just try to close your eyes now?" The stare of them made my heart ache.

"No. I want to tell you this. I'll sleep afterward. The dog found me. It found me; so I thought I might as well get the boy to take me to the railroad. There couldn't be much risk. He was a stupid Portuguese, with hardly any English. He let me climb up to the high seat beside him; but when we got to the Meaghers highway he began slewing his horses to go north. That would take us back past the camp. 'Stop,' I said, and when he wouldn't, 'I'll give you a hundred dollars to take me down to the station.'

"I oughtn't to have offered so much. It just scared him. He pulled his team back hard. 'Get down off my wagon,' he said, and I had to get down—he would have shoved me off. I almost believe he would have struck me. While his four horses were all across the road and I was trying to argue, we heard the sound of a machine, and then a roadster came around the turn, its lights full on me!

"I thought the end had come, yet the moment the man spoke and asked, 'Is anything the matter? Have you had an accident, Madam?' I knew he wasn't one of the detectives. The Portuguese wagon-driver would have been the safe one, if I could have got him to take me to the station. He hadn't English enough to tell anything; but he whipped up and left me there face to face with this man in the roadster."

Poor thing, I was glad then she had made me read the paper. She hadn't seen where, on the second page, there was a later dispatch telling how the detectives had rounded up the driver of a wood wagon who admitted that he had carried the mysterious woman some distance and been offered a hundred dollars to take her to the station!

"Callie—have I already told you about this man that gave me the lift in his machine? Did I mention him before? He said he knew you. Called you Mrs. Oliver Baird."

"Yes—yes." There would be neighbours who remembered me.

"He was coming from the hotel back there; he'd started at four o'clock so as to make the early train over at Stanleyton. He didn't ask any questions. He would take me to the station with him. I thought the worst of it was over. That was when we talked about you. He hadn't known but that you were living at Meaghers. I told him you were in San Vicente, in the same house with me. He seemed to have been away a good while, and not to remember the roads very well. We saw a lantern and a man down in a cow lot at his milking, and he left me in the auto while he went to inquire."

Somehow I knew what was coming.

"Oliver Baird—that's your husband's name, isn't it?" I nodded.

"That was the man milking. He came to the fence, and held up his lantern and talked. I saw both their faces. He pointed, explaining about the route. I heard, coming on the road above, the racket of a motorcycle, and a car with a Klaxon horn. I scrambled out of the auto, got through the fence and was in a little shed, burrowing down behind some hay, when the men came up—first the one on the motorcycle, then two others, in the car, with Louis, the chauffeur, driving."

Her voice had been strong, rapid, monotonous! now it broke with a kind of shudder and she was silent for a moment, evidently going back over that scene.

"What beasts such men are!" she burst out finally. "How they relished their job! How they enjoyed telling of the arrests they'd made and the woman they were after! She was wanted in a white slave case—as a witness. I had my eye at a chink in the shed wall; it chanced that I could see the face of the gentleman who had brought me in the roadster. I wondered if he'd glance toward his machine in such a way as to make them suspicious. He didn't. He

let them do the talking. He kept still while Baird told them he hadn't seen or heard of the party they were after. They didn't trust the silent man. When he came back to the road, they followed. They searched his roadster. They apologised—said the woman might have slipped under the rugs while his back was turned—but when he drove away the man on the motorcycle followed him close, while the two others finally went off toward the Meaghers station."

She closed her eyes at last. I was edging out of my chair when she opened them and asked,

"Callie—would you mind getting me some water?"

I brought the glass, and she drank, almost smiling as she looked up over the tumbler rim to say,

"Your husband gave me a drink out of one of the milk bottles before daylight this morning. I went down to the railroad in his wagon—on the seat beside him. Isn't that queer?"

Queer! I set the glass back and looked at her, trying to get the grotesque fact through my head that she had been, at dawn this morning, out in the cow lot on the ranch, with Oliver!

"I had to ask him for help," she went on. "He was my last hope. I didn't say I was the woman they were after, and he didn't mention their being after anyone. I had waited in the shed, afraid, till he was through milking, and it was when we were going down the hill that he spoke, 'Stanleyton and Meaghers are both watched,' and offered to take me on to the junction if I'd wait at somebody-or-other's store till he came back. 'Not at any house,' I said. I waited in some bushes at the edge of a field while he went on and shipped the milk. I thought probably he'd not come back. Why should he? It was getting light. And there I was skulking in the bushes in that open field, like a rat in a trap. If he didn't come—if he didn't come—I'd better have stayed and faced them at the front door. O God,

to fail after all I'd gone through! I hadn't even anything to kill myself with—and if I'd had it—to die there—disgraced——”

“But you're all right now,” I said, and coaxed her. “Don't talk any more about it. You must go to sleep.”

“In a minute,” she murmured. “But he did come back. He came back——” and she went on feverishly to tell me all about the miserable slow train she got at the Junction, the hours of waiting at Cascade, the changing cars, the final securing of a Pullman and being able to pass for a sick woman who had lost her luggage. Mrs. Tipton came back while we were in the thick of it, and put a stop to the talking.

I got up to say good-night, and then I had to tell Miss Chandler that I was leaving for Hopfields early next morning, to be gone at least six weeks.

“Well—that's better,” she agreed on a sort of falling note. And then: “Poor Callie!”

She threw out a hand and caught mine. For awhile she lay and looked at me. There were no apologies or explanations, but I saw how she felt.

She was still holding onto my fingers, her eyes on mine, detaining me, as Mrs. Tipton went into the bathroom to renew the hot-water bottle.

“That man that helped me away in his auto,” she repeated vaguely, “did I tell you his name?”

“No.”

“He gave it to the detectives. It was Stanley—Philip Stanley.”

CHAPTER XVII

LAS PALMAS HOP RANCH

IT'S strange how we agree that the things we can see and hear and touch are real, and call the invisibles that take hold of our feelings imaginary. When Miss Chandler, lying there on the bed in her room, holding my hand for good-bye, told me casually that just the night before she had seen Philip—sat beside him, talked to him, spoken my name to him—something somewhere swung open like a door, and the past marched on me. A door—it was a floodgate! What came in the tide that it let loose threatened to drown out the present.

Since that day of parting in the side yard of his father's house, when I felt Philip had definitely shut me out, my struggle had been always to forget, unless I could think of him as of any other childhood friend. When my first frantic rebellion and longing began to die down into the dull ache that is known as resignation, it seemed that I might accomplish this. And now Miss Chandler, staring at me from the pillow, babbling because the relief and the dose of medicine she'd had made her want to talk, told me of some stranger who had been kind to her, adding as an unimportant detail that it was Philip Stanley. And with the knowledge that he had been last night in the road in front of our ranch and got his first word of me from a disgraced fugitive, a woman in her shameful position, the pang that went through me was as disproportionate, as absurd, as the supersensitiveness of the very young girl who would almost rather die than appear at a disadvantage before her sweetheart!

Well—I couldn't set out on that sort of thing at this age. Philip had passed, so far as I was concerned, into

the region of mystery, the world of the unguessed, one of the things that will never be understood, and therefore never forgotten; yet before he went he had so wrung my heart that mere common sense put me on the defensive against his very memory. Instinctively I got out of Miss Chandler's room and up to Boyce as quickly as I could. Here was one thing right in my life, anyhow. I switched on the lights and stood looking down on him asleep there.

It was a blankety, foggy, hot August night; I felt oppressed, and finally went to the window and tried to push it a little wider open. Down yonder in the dark of the back yard was Mr. Dale's bungalow—closed, black, empty. Anything in my life that concerned him was just like that, too—closed, black, empty. I turned back to the lighted room, to Boy in his blue silk pajamas, made over from the very suit I had seen one night on the sleeping porch at Harvey Watkins's house. I smoothed the little breast pocket which I had noticed as the cut-and-basted garments lay in Dele's work-basket. Dele had meant well, in her way; and Harvey had meant ill enough in his—and both of them were as completely nothing to me as though they had never existed. On my table, packed up to be left behind, for use when I came back ready to try for another job, were some notebooks and office things—stuff I had acquired with my new trade. It might have seemed that they, concerning the future as they did, would have had some substance, some reality; but at that moment they were as dreamy and unreal as the rest.

Boy mumbled a word in his sleep, threw his doubled fists up on the pillow and yawned, squirming away from the light. I stooped and kissed his little open mouth. Tomorrow he and I would be starting out together. I must go to bed and get some rest like a sensible person.

Boy and I had to get up while all the rest of the house, except the kitchen, was asleep; but there was no trouble with him after I mentioned "the cars." Orma served our

breakfast and had a big lunch already put up for us, explaining,

"The Mrs. told me to. She's in bed now, trying to get a little sleep. Said she was up nearly all night—toothache or something. Say, Miss Chandler's home."

I glanced up at her unconscious face; no, she hadn't meant to imply a connection between the two statements.

"Oh, yes," I said before I thought.

"How'd you know?" Orma looked at me in surprise. "She got in at three o'clock this morning, the Mrs. said."

"I was awake a good deal in the night myself," I evaded.

"'Fraid you'd miss your train," Orma was sympathetic. "I'm always that way. You've got plenty of time. Say, I wish you'd look what's in this morning's 'Examiner'—"

"I saw it in the 'Clarion' last night," I put in hastily as she turned to the sideboard where the San Francisco papers lay. From where I sat my eye caught the heavy-faced type—**MANN WHITE SLAVE**——"

"Let's go to the cars now," Boyce was fed, ready to play the man's part of hustling everybody along.

It was "All right, dear; we're off. Good-bye, Orma—tell them all good-bye again"—and I was relieved to be at last out in the cool, morning street, the poor old Poinsettia with its festering secret behind me, something new and clean—if it was only hop picking—ahead. I could even share Boyce's enthusiasm for "the cars."

I didn't have to go down to the central station; the little branch line to Corinth may be picked up at several points in San Vicente and its suburbs. We left from the shed three blocks back of the house. I gave Boyce the window-seat, and, with most of him waving outside in splendid excitement, while I hung on to the slack of his clothes, we got started. As the little local train joggled along, and stopped at its stations, as I held automatically to the tail of Boyce's blouse, or as automatically answered the occasional

questions he turned to shout at me, I began to drift back into old remembrance. Little things I hadn't thought of for years came to me there, things that had been said about dresses I had worn, places I had gone, the very look of the weeds by the pathside on certain evenings walking home from school. I lost track of where I was and woke with a jerk when the conductor demanded my ticket. He must have been used to it, for he merely repeated the demand, chucked Boyce under the chin, said it wouldn't be long until I'd be paying fare for him, and went on.

Despite the motion of the train, the heat soon began to be oppressive. Our car was full of folks going up to pick hops, and of talk about it. They called to each other back and forth, things related to the work, comparing notes of the ranches on which they had picked the year before, or the year before that. Some of them were rather glum over the prospect at Las Palmas, grumbling that they'd heard they'd already more pickers than would be needed.

I listened, but asked no questions, and didn't join in the talk at all. What would have been the use? I must go on now; I couldn't go back. If I felt any doubt on the point, I had but to glance across where in the seat opposite me they were passing around the "Examiner" that Orma had offered me with my breakfast, enjoying, as people do, the scandalous details of the Boggs-Pendleton case. Oh, no, no, I must get away from San Vicente. Working folks always do a great deal of grumbling about a job like hop-picking, I said to myself, and if others could stand it Boy and I could, for awhile.

As we ran into the outskirts of Corinth, Boy waved and squirmed as though he would go entirely through the window. I clutched his blouse-tail tight while he shouted back to me,

"Now, Muvver—now—we're coming to Aunt Emma's house! Watch, and you'll see it."

When we did pass the place where Mrs. Eccles's daugh-

ter lived he was dreadfully disappointed because there was no calf in the side yard, as there always had been when he was there. He landed back on the seat against me with a thump, and jolted out,

"Where you s'pose it's gone? What you s'pose those folks have done with that calf?"

The only suggestion that came to my mind—a butcher—wouldn't have pleased Boy.

"It was a red calf, Muvver," he explained. "It would dest shake its head and holler 'Maah'! It chased me; Aunt Emma said it was dest playful."

"Well, I expect it's gone away somewhere to play with other little calves," I offered, as I wiped his earnest, perspiring face. "Come, dear—here's where we get off."

The train stopped; all those who were pickers piled out, Boy and I with the rest. Bundles of bedding were thrown from the baggage car. It was sweltering. We were sticky, and gritty with dust. The burning heat of the boards in the platform scorched through the thin soles of my shoes.

The Hopfields district lies in a valley so broad that the saw-tooth mountains on one side and the far-away buttes on the other, make a merely irregular horizon. Between them is a flat, or only slightly rolling country now at the height of its dry season. Corinth, a supply town for the great hop ranches about, had been a village fifty years ago, when they built in the Spanish fashion, of grey stone, with two-story porches that arcaded the sidewalks. Now that the railroad had come in, and the hop business, these few old houses looked out of place among the great square frame store buildings and pretty little bungalows. Corinth was half asleep and half awake; the old part drowsing in the sun, the new elbowing it. Everything looked breathless and parched. This was the rush time of the year when the normal village and ranch life was overflowed with a motley, despised tide of seasonal workers. I knew enough about such things to understand the posi-

tion I was taking in life when I went with the hop-pickers. The road that ran by the station platform was ankle deep in yellow dust. The train went on and left that platform full of people and baggage.

There were wagons, one of them backed up to the boards had the name Las Palmas painted on it. It was a good team with a negro driver. Down at the other end of the platform the pickers, noisy and perspiring, were getting their rolls, shouldering them up and tramping away in the heat. There were women and children among them, but I couldn't go like that. I'd see if I couldn't get my stuff taken out in that Las Palmas wagon. I had to leave Boy in the broiling sun with my suit-case while I went to ask. I was at the pile of luggage and thought I'd got sight of my own sack when a familiar voice sang out, "Don't tell me this is the little lady from the Red Leaf Inn?"

It was the name Joe Ed Tipton sometimes gave the Poinsettia, and there was Joe Ed himself, his face peeling with new sunburn, as shabby and irresponsible looking as anyone in sight.

"Oh, Joe Ed," I cried, "it's awfully good to see you! I wonder if you could help me get my stuff out here. I want to find if they'll take it over in the Las Palmas wagon."

"Sure!" he cried promptly, though he looked a bit puzzled. "I'm from Las Palmas myself. I'm captain of that wagon to-day—in to see about some freight. You going up to our ranch? Well, you don't want to do much fooling around in the hotness of this heat. Let's get into the station, and I'll 'phone and tell the folks you're here. It's a wonder they wouldn't meet you—they send the car over for guests. You couldn't walk it."

"Wait, Joe," I pulled back as he drew me toward the door, "I don't know the folks at Las Palmas; I'm not a visitor. I came here to pick hops, and I've got to see about my bedding roll."

"Heh—you—" Joe Ed whirled on me in blank amazement—"you're joking." He studied my face.

"No, if there's any joke it's on me," I said. "My outfit is in one of those bundles there. I've come to stay."

He stood a moment in a sort of slacked attitude, hands deep in pockets, while the crowd jostled us. I saw now that he was thinner than I had ever known him—not much left of him but skin and bone and those high spirits that nothing seemed to quench. Suddenly he threw up his head with a laugh, demanding,

"Why not? It's all in a lifetime. What would you be doing anyhow but the most unlikely thing in the world? and getting by with it, too. Gimme your check."

He plunged at the pile of baggage, and discovered mine with a shout,

"If she ain't got the same old outfit we took to the Yosemite! Look who's here, Bice," he spoke to the negro driver. "Here's the little lady that held up our train at Meaghers last year."

"Why, how do you do, Bice?" I said. The big black man on the wagon seat turned and touched his straw hat to me, then, looking above the heads of the crowd to where Boy stood by my suit-case, asked, "Won't you and the little gentleman ride over with us?"

"Sure they will," said Joe, who had got the bedding roll into the wagon. As he and I went down the platform for Boy, he added, jerking his head a little backward toward the wagon and its driver, "I brought the poor old ginny along with me to the ranch to get him away from the booze. I have him on an allowance. He's playing square with me. When he's all straightened up—and things are so I can go home again—I'll present him to mother for a butler. You ought to see him buttle!"

"Joe Ed," I began, a little embarrassed, "you could go home to-morrow—to-day—any time." I realised with a sinking heart how awfully I'd hate to have

him do so. "There's nothing— They—the suit's been dropped."

"It has?" he stopped and looked at me, then down at his shabby clothes, his blackened, scarred hands. "Hello, old timer," he said absently to Boy, picked up my suitcase, then turned and without another word let through the crowd toward the wagon. Bice lifted my son to the seat beside him, we found a fairly comfortable location on the load, I put up my umbrella and we started.

"You'll go back home, won't you?" I asked, as we jolted down the road, facing back toward the tail of the wagon, glad to be high enough to be out of some of the dust.

"I don't know," Joe Ed said slowly. "Somehow I can't see myself doing any Prodigal Son act." He lowered his tone and spoke under cover of the umbrella and the noises of the wagon. "And here's Bice; he'll be in fine shape by the time picking's over, if I stay by—and I'll have a little something to the good myself."

We left Corinth and soon began driving along beside hop fields. On and on we went; there seemed to be miles of it, the "rows" making interminable lanes of arbour-like, garlanded green, all pretty and fresh-looking in the midst of the golden-tan California summer landscape. As our wagon came opposite each opening we would glimpse pickers down that row, just dabs of moving colour; bending backs of those who worked low, lifted arms of the ones who pulled down the upper hops. At the near end of a row there was a woman in a gay head-handkerchief kneeling by a great open sack, with two little girls helping her strip hops into it from a green pile of vines beside them.

"Boy, are you seeing this?" I called. "That's the way we'll work."

"Harmon ranch," Joe Ed waved a hand. "Las Palmas hops don't come down to the road on this side."

It was a long, hot ride in the springless wagon. But I



JOE, ED AND I TOILED UP TO THE CAMP
IN THE BLISTERING HEAT

could hear Boy, up on the seat beside Bice, having a great time. We were at least better off than those who had to tramp it, whom we passed in little fagged, red-faced, perspiring squads, throwing our dust on them in addition to that which their own feet raised.

As we finally came to the big lower gate that led in to the camp ground and working portions of Las Palmas ranch, we got a view of the ranch house itself further on, with its own private entrance, and the avenue of tall palms that gave the place its name. Over there things were beautifully green and still and shady, the grounds about the big, dignified, secluded brick house handsomely kept up by irrigation. Turning in at the workmen's gate we lost sight of it for a moment, our view cut off by a big frame building with "Las Palmas Store" painted on the weatherboarding above its door in black letters a foot high. There was a smaller building beyond; the office, where I would have to sign up and get my picker's ticket. There were quite a number ahead of me; we saw we might be delayed; so Bice went on with his wagon and Boy went with him.

"Put her stuff down in that vacant place between the Pochin shack and the Monroe tent," Joe Ed gave directions. "We'll be up to look after them."

I signed the books. There was no tent to be had for me, but there would be plenty next morning. As Joe Ed and I toiled up to the camp in the blistering heat, he, with an encouraging hand under my elbow, made light conversation.

"I see the Hotel Van Stack is still running," he indicated a couple of straw stacks, with some blankets and bedding tossed in against them, that stood off a bit from the track we were following. "Bice and I slept there the first night, along with forty or fifty other extinguished guests. We're with the stags, now, in one of the bull-pens. It isn't so bad. Ventilation's fine, both places; fire escapes adequate, too."

It was after eleven o'clock. Everybody was in the field. The fifty or sixty shelters—board shacks and tents—scattered hit-or-miss on the top of the slope, the big “bullpens” as Joe Ed had called them—mere enclosures with flimsy fences of stretched gunny sacks—looked as deserted as a raffle of ill-smelling waste thrown out and bleaching in the sun. Away over yonder we had a glimpse of Bice’s wagon moving off toward the drying kilns; Boy and my things were left in the little strip of shade on the north side of one of the shanties.

“Right there’s where your tent’ll be,” Joe Ed told me. “The folks in that house are good people—the Pochins—Polish Jews; a little nutty on the I. W. W. subject—that’s all.”

“But you know I’m just from a grove of nuts, Joe,” I joked back rather feebly.

“That’s so,” he agreed. “But this has got the old Poinsett’ skun a mile. Little of everything here. See those Persians?” nodding after a group of dark-faced, turbaned men who had been on the train, and were now straggling away with their bundles toward a dry slough that lay off beside the camp. “They’ll flock with another bunch of the same sort that came up yesterday and fixed a roost for themselves in the tules. Catch them paying seventy-five cents a week for a tent. There are Syrians, Hindus, Japanese, Chinese, some Islanders, plenty of Mexicans; we’ve even got a few Indians, and every kind of European that Noah let out of the ark, as well as Bice and you and me. Ain’t she a gay old mix?”

“Yes,” I agreed. “I had no idea what it really was like. The worst you can say of it, it’s awfully interesting.”

“And at that it’ll be more interesting the further we get. Yes, ma’am, there’s going to be something of a hoo-roosh on Las Palmas ranch before the picking’s over.”

“What do you mean by a hoo-roosh?” I questioned a bit nervously.

"Strike," explained Joe Ed. "I'm blest if I see how in the old cat they can organise one—got no labor union back of 'em—about forty-seven varieties and languages to work with. The man who could pull it off's a wiz. But nervy little Barney Monroe, and Paul Cluett, and some of the others are sure going to buck the proposition."

"Strike!" I echoed, coming to a standstill. "What are they going to strike for?"

"Oh, for a-plenty!" Joe Ed pulled a bit at the elbow he held. "Come along, you'll hear all about it this evening. When we're not picking hops, we're holding meetings. You can't keep out of it. You'll be asked to join the I. W. W. before you're five hours older."

"The I. W. W.—what's that?" I had a vague notion that I ought to know.

"Industrial Workers of the World—the only organ-isation (I quote from our distinguished speakers) that embraces all labouring people, as sich—folks without trades—see?"

"Muvver, I'm hungry!" Boy hallooed, as we came up.

It was a heavenly relief to get into the shade where he stood. The little house was fast closed, and on its door a square of pasteboard, like the top of a shoe-box, had the name Pochin.

"You'll like Sonya and Vera Pochin," said Joe Ed. "They've got pep. Young and good lookers, both of 'em—and can dance all night. But they'd rather lead a Votes for Women procession in the hot sun like this, or go to one of their I. W. W. meetings."

"Muvver, I'm hungry," Boy repeated without the slightest variation.

"Yes, yes," I hushed him, "we'll eat now, before we go to the field. There's plenty for you, too, Joe Ed. Oh, dear" as I turned my suit-case over sideways and began pulling things out, "I forgot to get condensed milk at the store for Boy!"

Joe Ed straightened up and sighted around, announcing offhand,

"I'll borrow a can for you." Most of the tents and shacks were posted with scrawled notices: "Keep out!" "Let Things Alone!" but he hailed a short, dark, active man who came ploughing at an amazing pace through that fiery heat up the way we had just travelled. "Hello, Barney! Got a can of milk to lend us?—five-cent size. (Mrs. Baird, Mr. Monroe.) If she opens a ten-center in this heat it'll spoil before she can use it."

"Yep, glad to oblige." The little man didn't halt till he was in the shade of the tent beyond us. There he checked and wiped the streaming sweat from his darkly flushed face. Joe pulled open the camping kit, got a tin bucket and ran over to the well. Barney Monroe brought the small milk can and stopped to punch it for me, setting his own lunch bucket and water jug down to do so.

The first thing I did when Joe Ed fetched the water was to wet a towel-end and cleanse the dust from our hot, sticky faces and hands. I had the milk in the tin cup, Boy was nudging my elbow thirstily with his, "Now, Muvver," when I glanced over and saw blue flies whirling above the sump hole around the well from which that water had come.

"My goodness!" I said, startled. "I can't let Boy drink that. It ought to be boiled—for a child, anyhow."

"It ought to be boiled for a hog!" flamed out Monroe, mopping his streaming face again. "This in my jug hasn't been boiled, and I've got two kids out there in the field with my wife, that'll have to drink it—glad to get it. We can't afford to buy from that infernal stew-wagon."

"'S all right, Muvver—'s all right. I'm so-o firsty!" Boyce protested. But I lit my lamp stove.

"Can't you work that stew-wagon girl, Barney?" bantered Joe Ed, as he set the water on for me. "I get a drink from her, whether I buy or not."

"No, I can't." Monroe suddenly showed a flash of white teeth. "I've not got your beauty and winning ways." He glanced at my sterilising operations. "Lady, that may be a pretty bad well over there, but let me tell you, by eight of a morning it and the other one are all pumped out. They stand in line then to fill their jugs, and lose the time from the picking. Better get what you need now. There ain't any to be had in the field, except what you carry there. You can take enough to do you, or you can perish for it, or you can buy some mean stuff you don't want from the stew-wagon and get a glass of good ice water thrown in."

"Business as she is bizzed at the present moment on the hop ranch of Las Palmas in Chavez county, California," Joe Ed contributed, as I was silent, laying out the lunch.

"They've really got more pickers now than they can properly take care of, haven't they?" I ventured.

"Of course they've got too many folks here!" Monroe looked at me in a sort of helpless fury. "It's what they wanted. For what else would they advertise all up and down the coast and five miles out to sea, 'Light work in the open air, good pay, a job for every member of the family'? And every pound of human flesh on this ranch will pay them toll before it gets off. Sventy-five cents a week for a tent—there's good money for 'em in that alone."

"But I couldn't get any tent," I objected.

"Don't worry," he said. "The tents will be here. Anything that they sell you at five hundred per cent. profit will be here. They won't let a grocer's delivery wagon on the place; you'll buy from the ranch store what they've got, not what you want. Another thing: the going price for hop-picking in California this year is a dollar a hundred. The cheque that Las Palmas gives for a hundred pounds of clean hops, you can cash for only ninety cents. They hold back the rest—they say they'll give it to you as a bonus if you stay the season out. But they see to it that condi-

tions are so bad that you can't stay; there's a stream of people leaving all the time—and leaving behind 'em ten per cent. of the pay they've slaved for. That's the arrangement you put your name to when you signed for your picker's ticket. Ten per cent. bonus—yah!”

“Have any luck with the boss this morning?” Joe Ed edged in quietly. “He going to do anything about high-pole men for these women, and someone to load the heavy sacks for 'em?”

“Got plenty more promises,” said Monroe, scowling. “They promised tents to-morrow—and tents'll come; high-pole men to-morrow; some cleaning up of this stinking camp to-morrow. God knows if we'll get either.” He snapped his fingers, snatched up jug and bucket. “We're in a hell of a fix here; but if we stand together—maybe—”

He whirled and went steaming away.

Joe Ed and I scarcely looked at each other all through lunch. Boy was the only one who ate his food with appetite—children haven't much sense of smell. He wanted to know all about the queer things he saw, and Joe Ed kept giving him funny answers, and seemed to take no notice of my having nothing to say. When we had eaten, I didn't see anything else to do but go on out to the field; he had to get back to his work; there was no use being scared away before I had even tried.

It was a mile from the camp to the picking. We passed the drying kilns, the stables, a group of small scattered houses, some of them pretty little places, white-painted and with front yards full of flowers. These were the dwellings of the permanent employees on Las Palmas. It took a lot of them for the year-round ranch work; they made another class of people, holding themselves very much above the pickers. I realised this when a small girl doubled over one of those neat fences shouted to my son, “Hello, boy!” and an exasperated voice called from the

cottage, "Come in here, this minute, Winona, and let those folks alone."

We followed a trail through a great stubble-field where barley had been cut for the horses, skirted a pasture with cows; by the time we got to the field we were walking pretty much in silence; even Boy's talk had run out; Joe Ed was too hot to joke. We had eaten so early that we now passed hundreds of pickers taking their lunch, sitting around in the shade of the rows near the driveway, tired-looking, hot, streaked with sweat and dust. There was Barney Monroe, with his wife and children—two pretty little black-eyed things—he had spoken of. As we came up he made a grim gesture with the tin cup into which he was pouring that water that had not been boiled.

"This is Mrs. Baird that I told you of, Lucy," he said to his wife. "She and the kid are going to be neighbours to us in camp."

I had never thought of finding anybody there that I'd known before, but the Clarks, a poor family that lived in back of the Cronin building on Chico street, spoke to me as I passed. Further down an old man who used to do odd jobs out at Las Reudas hailed Boyce, waving an arm. And so, when somebody called, "Hello, how d'ye do, Mrs. Baird," I wasn't greatly surprised to discover in the big, grimy-faced fellow who spoke, slab of cheese in hand, Rudolph Flegel, old Flegel's son by a first wife. Dolph couldn't get on with his stepmother—just drifted around from orchard to orchard, from packing place to cannery, in the seasons.

"Hello, Rudolph," I said, and was for hurrying forward to our place; but he got up and came blundering along with us, like a friendly stray pup. Joe Ed went a little way down the row to some folks there, Boy at his heels.

"Goin' to pick?" questioned Rudolph eagerly.

I nodded.

"When d'you leave Meaghers? Was you there when them swells at the Pendleton camp——?"

Dolph could eat and talk (after a fashion) at the same time.

"I've been away from Meaghers more than a year," I tried to divert him.

"Oh," he looked disappointed. "Well, you seen it in the papers, didn't you? Funny, about that woman—huh? I bet I could 'a' found her for 'em, if I'd 'a' been there. You know she couldn't get away—in her nightgown!"

"Dolph," I interrupted, "I'm in a hurry," and went after Joe Ed and Boy. I left him standing there, uncouth, at a loss as to how he had offended, muttering,

"Well, see you later, mebbe."

The people Joe Ed had stopped beside were the Pochins, a great tribe headed by a meek, stooped, long-bearded old man whom everybody called Father Abraham, and his wife, married sons and daughters with youngsters of their own, the two girls Vera and Sonya, and a whole fry of smaller children, the second and third generation all open-eyed, clever, high-strung, temperamental looking—public school products. In spite of sunburn and hard living, the grown daughters were very handsome; Sonya in a thin, fiery fashion, her sister Vera with the broad-browed Madonna beauty. When Joe Ed explained that I was to have a tent next theirs in camp, the little withered old mother at once offered,

"Might you should throw in with us for supper to-night, so you wouldn't be lonesome?"

"Thank you. I'll be glad to," I said. Then we found my row; Joe Ed went on to his and out of my sight.

CHAPTER XVIII

THREE DAYS

THOSE arbour'd green aisles of Las Palmas hop ranch that had looked so cool and peaceful from the train simmered in a heat that ranged day by day from one hundred and six to one hundred and twenty. There was always a dry rustle there, whether the wind blew or not, and the dusty, sleepy smell of hops. I stood in that smothering lane of vines, face to face with the job I had undertaken, my bridges burned behind me. The salt moisture ran down my face; I looked round uneasily at Boy. He was squared away beside an empty hop sack, red-faced, gazing with screwed-up eyes at the scratchy, dangling pendant of vine with its thick-set, papery hops, that swung in front of him.

"You can sit down and rest, Muvver, if you want to," he offered. "You show me—I'll pick 'em."

"Pooh—the idea! I'm not tired. We'll both pick."

At it we went. The old gloves I wore saved my hands from being scratched and then smeared with the black, sticky sap of the vines. There was no use attempting to keep Boy's hard, stubby little paws out of it. He worked like a tiger; his only complaint was of the tepid, boiled water in our bottle. So when a light covered wagon passed the end of the row, I called and stopped it, intending to buy him a cool drink. As I went toward the outfit I saw that the driver was a mature woman, dressed girlishly in ready-made middy and outing skirt, with tennis shoes and silk stockings; but I was right up to her before I realised that it was Milt Stanley's wife.

"Hello, Callie," she said easily. "Milt swore he found your name on to-day's list. How d'ye do?"

"Milt!" I echoed. "Is he at Las Palmas?"

"Yep, we're all here." She slid me a sidelong look. "That's no news to you, is it? Milt's manager."

"Manager—of this ranch?"

"Why, sure. Callie, he hasn't drank a drop for six months—and he's manager. I'm so doggoned thankful that I'm willing to drive round and peddle grub, or anything, to help out."

"Is that your horse and wagon?" Boyce spoke up, hands in overall pockets, squinting judicially at the turnout. "Are you got ice-water to sell?"

"Hello! I know whose kid you are." Luella took him up.

"He wants a cool drink," I said. "Can I buy one?"

"Oh, I don't *sell* water," she began, just as Joe Ed's lean, perspiring young face thrust itself around the green shoulder of my row.

"No, you don't, Louisiana Lou—you give it away!" he jeered. He had an empty fruit-jar in his hand, and he came on with a perfectly businesslike air.

"Now, you Joe!" Luella's features, inexpressive as though they had been cut out of a raw potato, changed just as I had seen Mrs. Thrasher's wooden countenance do. She smiled at Joe Ed. "Take what you want; but don't you tote off any of that water for them other people."

He went to the back of the wagon, and proceeded to help himself. Luella handed a filled glass to me for Boyce, saying,

"This is on me, too, Callie." Then as she noted the hand in which I took the tumbler, "Gloves!" she simpered. "Careful of your looks as ever. My, but you were a pretty little thing when Phil and you used to go together back in Stanleyton!"

"I want anovver!" Boyce had wolfed down his one glass.

"Sure, kid." Then in a lower tone, passing it out, "Ever hear from Phil these days?"

I shook my head.

"What! You didn't know he'd cut loose from the old folks entirely?"

"No," I was brief. "Thank you for the water. Come, Boyce, we must get to work."

"Well, wait a minute till I tell you," she persisted. I tried to stop her with,

"I know he's back on the coast. I heard that."

"Oh, but I'm telling you he ain't with his folks, nor liable to be with 'em any more. Did you know he never showed up for the whole four years he was in college?—stayed right through vacations—said the climate agreed with him—and they footed the bills. Hold on, Callie—don't rush. They paid and paid—you know Phil's a spender—and as soon as he got his diploma he walked in on 'em, the swellest looking thing you ever seen, and began givin' 'em his views—laying the law down to 'em—and there was one grand split. Phil just as good as kicked himself out of the house. Milt's It with them now. I guess Phil's gone right down, got to be just a sort of tramp. Have a glass of lemonade on me, Callie, you and Joe."

"No thanks, we'd rather live longer," Joe Ed came up and declined for us both light-heartedly. "Say, Louisiana Lou, is it acetic acid or Prussic, that you murderers use for that wassail?"

"You young devil!" she grinned at him as she drove off and he turned to me instantly with,

"Who's Phil?"

"Oh—a boy I used to know—when I was in school."

"An old sweetheart," Joe went straight to it. "Was she talking about Philip Stanley?"

"Yes."

"And little Dewdrop Auntie who drives the busy stew-wagon says nevey's gone down in the world—got to be a tramp?"

"Oh, I shouldn't pay any attention to Luella's talk about him," I said impatiently.

"Right you are," Joe Ed agreed. "He was in San Francisco two weeks ago. The Pochins know him—got acquainted with him when he was doing that tramping that little Lulu mentioned. He went into it to get first-hand information. He's a Capital-and-Labor sharp, Sonya told me. I saw him once in Frisco. He looks a fat lot more like a plute than a tramp. So long; see you at dinner." Joe Ed went back to his work, and I turned to mine.

I had risen unusually early that morning after an almost sleepless night, and made a railway journey; and I had met some pretty hard setbacks. As the afternoon went on I felt the effect of this. The heat told on both Boy and me. After awhile he curled down and went to sleep, but I kept at it the best I could till we heard the whistle over at the drying kiln. Women had been dropping out and starting for the camp for some little time, going ahead to get supper, leaving their men to finish up. The last wagons were on their rounds. My afternoon's picking was not so heavy but what I could drag the sack down to the driveway and load it without much trouble; but the little frail-looking woman in the next row, who had been at work all day, was having a terrible time to handle a sack that would weigh a hundred pounds or more. I went to help her, and we were pulling at it when Joe Ed came whistling along and loaded it for us.

"Hey, old timer, you're soldiering on the job," he said, picking Boy up. We joined the steady, scattering stream that was moving from the hop fields toward that gaunt, forlorn, ill-smelling slope where the camp was.

The terrible sun had gone down clear and red in a cloudless sky, with promise of another burning day. The camp full of people, every tent and shack lighted by its candle, lamp or lantern, the little outside cooking fires seeming to make the general heat intolerable, was like a big, poor,

dirty street fair. Down the line somewhere a phonograph was playing, a ten-year-old boy jumping up and running, hunk of bread and meat in hand, to change the records. Everybody was trying to keep cool. There were both men and women barefoot. The children had as little on as possible. Lights winked over in the tules where the Orientals were.

I ate with the Pochins and Monroes that first evening. We all helped to get the meal, and then sat around on the ground to eat it. Joe Ed came over with a glass of bacon and a bottle of jam, and joined us. Boy, fresh after his long nap, was delighted to be with all those children. Tired little souls, they were well behaved, like weary men and women, but nice as could be to him. As I sat there, the guest of honour, I had a sudden, ludicrous recollection of that first meal of mine at the Poinsettia, and how differently I had been treated.

Now I saw Barney Cluett for the first time, a broad, bench-legged, round-faced man, with two deep dimples that played in his brick-red cheeks when he spoke. He was after Monroe to go over and talk strike, through an interpreter, to the Hindus and Persians. The first thing he said to me was,

"Are you going to join the I. W. W. and strike with us?"

"Sure we are," Joe Ed, as usual, answered for me, and I let it go at that.

I'll say here that I stuck it out and picked hops on Las Palmas ranch for three days. My memories of those days are all of parching thirst and flies, of stench and despair and the lamentations of the people. The temperature ran frightfully high; the housing was inhuman; the sanitary arrangements something you couldn't talk about. The best I could do, working hard, was about ninety cents a day. Some of the men, keeping at it from dark to dark, doubled that; families, all picking into one sack, had the hopeful

feeling that they made a good bit. But in the field there wasn't even an attempt at the ameliorations and decencies of civilised life. The humiliations, the cruel, needless exposure of a day there almost outweighed the physical distress of sweltering heat and underpaid hard work.

When Luella Stanley would come driving that execrated stew-wagon through the fields, I used to wonder how even she had the face. When she showed a disposition to hang around a bit and try to draw me out, I would just put the nickel in Boy's hand, and send him down the row by himself to get what he wanted. I never went to the office and seldom to the store, so that I only saw Milt once, and that time there wasn't a word said about things on the ranch here. He asked me, almost in Luella's exact words, if I'd seen or heard from Phil lately.

Of course the individual protests and complaints must have been pouring in steadily on the ranch management; while Monroe Cluett and four or five of the other men were putting every minute they could get from their picking into organising work. Little groups of moving men, stripped to their undershirts and trousers, their faces shining with sweat, were always at it of an evening. They'd sent for I. W. W. literature, and "Wobblies," as Industrial Workers of the World agitators are called. They were trying to get up a big, representative meeting and make a formal protest, so that the owners would have to take notice of them, though to an outsider the uniting of that great, drifting, groaning, suffering crowd, that spoke in nearly thirty different tongues, in an effective strike, seemed hopeless.

As Wednesday and Thursday went by with no cleaning up of the camp nor any sanitation in the fields, dysentery broke out. The Pochins had two children actually down, and several others of the tribe weren't fit to be at work. Little Ida Monroe was very bad Friday night. Of course her mother was taking care of her, but with her crying,

and the groans of a thirteen-year-old girl in a tent further down, nobody in our neighbourhood got much sleep.

The truth is that the place, with its smells and dirt, and lack of all decent conveniences, had become a man-made hell. Yet under the pressure of a misery that might have been expected to make devils of them, these poverty-stricken, seasonal workers were considerate and forbearing. Human nature, at the breaking point, didn't show so badly. I saw beautiful, compassionate, impersonal, clean kindness shown by ignorant, driven, harried men to the more harried and driven women about them, and this without the hateful suggestion of what we agree to call gallantry. It was a contrast to the behaviour of the Harvey Watkins and Stokes sort; in its light Mr. Dale showed a poor thing indeed.

Right through the worst of it the young folks wanted to have a good time. Joe Ed and his ukelele were in constant demand. That inextinguishable spirit of his was like a flash of sun, moving about in the dull misery of the Las Palmas situation. He was always ready to play, to dance; he struck up a comradeship with an English lad whose name I never knew because everybody just called him "English." This boy had a soaring young tenor, and the two of them generally led the I. W. W. songs that were liked best. Of an evening they used to carry a phonograph over to the dance platform and dance, though the older women sighed, "How do they get the strength!"

Each evening Sonya took the San Francisco papers and, sitting under the lantern that hung on the front wall of their shanty, read out the news. A crowd gathered to listen to her. There was a lot of the Boggs-Pendleton case to make me wince with its "drag-net," and "sleuths" and "clue" and "mysterious missing woman witness." It kept me well reminded that whatever the state of things here, I didn't want to go back to San Vicente.

I came on Wednesday; on Saturday evening, at last,

they got together a sort of meeting. There wasn't any dancing that night, or any singing. Sonya's papers lay unread below the lantern. Down near the driveway—because there was a rumour that the proprietor of Las Palmas had motored into Corinth and would come back past there—they gathered in the summer dusk, a few hundred bewildered, discouraged men and women.

I left Boy with the Monroe and Pochin children. I'd have to go back and put him to bed pretty soon; but I did want to hear some of the speaking anyhow. It had begun when I got there, and I stood on the outskirts. There were all sorts of people—fathers and mothers of families with their children about them; hoboes and revolutionaries, some plainly as much scared as I was, and others keen for the fight, all looking shadowy and unreal in the twilight. Dark, timid, puzzled faces and foreign costumes showed here and there; turbaned heads were among those craned forward to listen to the speakers.

That tired, hot, dirty crowd could look far up to where, in the brilliant electric light streaming from the windows of the owner's big brick house—a tantalising sight—the gyrating arms of the automatic sprinklers tossed bright water to keep the lawn fresh and green. The temperature had run up to a hundred and five in the shade of the vines that day; we could smell the camp from where we stood; the Saturday night pay in our pockets was a reminder of its shortage. I can't see yet anything unreasonable in the demands they were talking of—free drinking water, a cleaning up of the camp, and the same pay other ranches were giving.

I was saying this over and over to myself, a lump in my throat while I listened and looked about. Right behind me a Klaxon horn snarled out startlingly. I screamed and fell back with the rest. Moving as silently as a big shadow, a powerful, handsome automobile was almost on us. I looked directly up into the face of the man at the

wheel. It was a fellow by the name of Brockaw, who used to be a teamster in Corinth, and was now constable at Las Palmas, a sworn county officer, but paid by the ranch. A lady and gentleman sat on the back seat.

"The owners," whispered a woman near me. The car had come to a stop; our speakers turned and surged right up to it; the press wedged me in so that where I stood now the headlights blinded me, and I could see only the faces of that miserable crowd all raised to those who sat in the machine.

Above the throbbing of the engine I heard Paul Cluett saying, "We want to ask you, sir—" and then a curiously familiar voice broke in from the auto, "Who are you? What's all this?" I pushed desperately around to the side, got the light out of my eyes, and saw that the lady and gentleman there in the car were Mr. and Mrs. Stanley!

I suppose that Paul Cluett went on with what he was saying; indeed I know he must have done so, for the first thing that was clear to me after that was Mr. Stanley's voice again:

"Hah! You can't take snap judgment on me, Cluett—stop my machine and try to hold me up for extra pay and drinking fountains. I've got nothing to say to you."

"I guess you'll have to give us an answer. Our committee——"

"Committee!" Mr. Stanley snorted at him. "Who are they?"

"Well, we haven't got—yet. Say—if we get 'em together, will you meet us?"

There was a strained silence, then, slowly, grudgingly, "Well . . . I'm not recognising any organisation by this, but——"

"Where'll you met us? When?" Barney Monroe was not to be held out of it any longer.

"At the office—the proper place," savagely. "To-morrow morning—ten, sharp. Four of you—no more. I'll give

you five minutes to say your say in then; that's as far as I'll go."

"In writing—to-night, yet, we send the paper," Father Abraham's voice was raised.

All this time Mrs. Stanley's eyes had been on me where I stood. Now she was pulling her husband's sleeve to call his attention.

"Who?" he blurted out impatiently, then as she pointed and whispered, "Where?" He saw me at last, glared at me for a moment, then,

"Clear the road there!" he shouted, and as they scuffled back they hissed him. "Brockaw, drive on."

With a roar the car leaped away, leaving behind it curses and shaken fists.

CHAPTER XIX

THE COMMITTEE

THE big, shining car went roaring on into the warm dusk, driven by a hired bully, carrying the angry old man and his contemptuous lady wife, leaving behind rage, misery, dirt and unseemliness, leaving me with the other undersirables.

I stood and looked after them. What an irony of fate that out of all the hop ranches in California I had blundered upon the one owned by these people! I ought to have known when I found Luella and Milt in positions here. They had both thought I did know; that was what they meant by asking me if I'd heard from Philip lately. They took it for granted I'd come to Las Palmas because of him. Of course they had hurried at once to Mr. and Mrs. Stanley and told them I was among the pickers—she wouldn't have recognised me to-night if she hadn't been looking for me. It stung all over my consciousness like nettles; and I was as keen to get away from the ranch as though it had been a nettle patch.

People pushed against me, and passed me. I looked around; the crowd was moving, leaving that trampled, dusty spot at the edge of the road, with its rebuff and disappointment, going with a rush toward the dance platform. Joe Ed bobbed up at my shoulder.

"Come on," he exulted. "Now we'll have it. This'll put pep into the limpest of 'em. By to-morrow they'll be solid."

I went with him in silence quite a way, edging toward the outskirts as we moved. Finally when we were almost opposite my tent,

"Don't come any farther with me, Joe," I said. "You go on to the meeting."

"Aren't you coming, too? What' up?" he halted, surprised.

"No, I've got to pack and get ready. I'm going to leave here in the morning, just as soon as I can."

"Scared of the strike?" solicitously. "Oh, there's not going to be any rough——"

"It's not that," I broke in. "I'll tell you some other time, Joe."

"Sure—sure—that's all right," he turned me toward the tent. "Course you ought never to have been here, anyhow."

Over yonder we could hear the young folks shouting half-joking objections to having their dance platform taken away from them. I distinguished Cluett's nasal, "Gwan—gwan, you kids. Got real business on hand here." Then Barney Monroe's fog-horn voice yelled for singers. Joe turned and ran.

Putting Boy to bed, I mechanically pulled out my slim purse and counted my money. Not enough to take me far. Well, it was only a question of living for a few weeks; I was up here now; maybe I'd better stop in Corinth and see Mrs. Eccles's son-in-law about a job on some other hop ranch till the season was over—that would carry me into the fall and the time of business chances in the cities. These hadn't looked so bad when I heard of them back in San Vicente; yet now they shrank to nothing. My spirit was still prostrate from that encounter with the Stanleys. I couldn't summon a bit of pride or hope. Lying there afterward in the dark, thinking it over, with the noises and the nauseous smells of the camp about me, it seemed that I had gone steadily down in the world since the time of my first defeat at the hands of these people, and that here and now I had about reached the bottom. If I had made any success—breaking away from a degrading marriage, get-

ting legal freedom, keeping my child and gaining a profession that would support us both—not in the dejection of that hour was I able to realise it. I just lay there and felt like the dust under the wheels on the Stanley motor as it had rolled past down yonder on the drive.

The meeting didn't hold very late. Its speaking and singing ceased about half-past ten; and then squads and bunches began to straggle past my tent, talking loud. Joe was right; they were in earnest now. They meant to make a stand for it to-morrow. They shouted and sang snatches of I. W. W. songs; those in the shacks and tents who were asleep, or trying to get to sleep, yelled at them fretfully, and were jerred for slackers. Altogether, it was a strange sort of night; for when that had quieted, and the camp—like a big, sick, suffering monster trying to get bedded down—seemed to be turning and moaning half conscious, a queer screeching that might have been laughter, or screams, or a fight, broke out over by the slough. Then someone ran past my tent in the dark with a pad, pad, pad of bare feet, and a whistle of loud breathing.

At dawn Boy waked me, fretting for a drink. When I looked at him—his cheeks too red, his tongue coated—I came to my senses with a jump. Here was my real reason for leaving Las Palmas ranch and its wretched conditions. One touch of anxiety for the child made me wonder at and despise last night's mood—a mood that could give any importance to what the Stanleys might think of my coming or leaving.

I didn't go back to bed, but dressed then and there—putting on my street clothes and laying out Boy's best things, too. The whole camp seemed to be waking early that Sunday morning. Before I was finished there were women out at the cooking fires getting breakfast. The calling back and forth from tent to tent, and, later, from one breakfasting group to another, sounded different from what it ever had before. There was a new tone to the noise

and clamour; the spirit of last night's meeting was in it.

By nine o'clock the place was a babel, people streaming up and down in the dust and heat, talking, gesticulating, arguing over appointments, directions, the strikers' plans for the day. I was packed and ready. Boy and I dressed, everything finished and closed up. I went over to the Pochins to see what I could find out about getting someone to take Boy and the baggage. Some friends of theirs had gone to the Harmon ranch the day before I came.

"How did the Salinskys move?" I asked Father Abraham.

"Tramped it," said he. "Mother, give me those tracts in Yiddish. I shall be off."

"Tramped!" I repeated. "Well, I can't do that."

"Off! You shall be off!" cried Mrs. Pochin, blankly, straightening up from the pallet she was spreading on the shady side of the shack for little Leo, the sickest of her grandchildren. "Who gets me, then, the arrowroot and magnesian for this child?"

"Mother, I'm on the committee." The old man spoke like a soldier who goes to the firing line.

"The committee! And Barney, too—his children can die, just so well, while he works by the committee."

"You women must tend to such things. Send the girls for what you need." Father Abraham moved off determinedly. "If the committee doesn't meet Stanley yet, mother, then we're all sick and we all die."

"Girls!" his wife wailed after him. "My girls ain't girls any more." She looked around to me with angry eyes full of tears. "My man goes; the boys, they went first; Vera and Sonya, long ago they chase off about somebody that comes for statistics on the Bureau of Labor at Washington. Dear God, what can I do?"

"Well," I hesitated, "I've got to go down to the store

anyhow and see about some way of getting moved. I'll try to get the things for you."

"Mrs. Baird," Barney Monroe's wife called from her door, "while you're trying, I wish you'd see if you can get some Jamaica ginger, or even some brandy that I could burn for Ellie. Poor Barney," she said, coming out to fetch me a fifty-cent piece; "I'm as sorry for him as I am for myself and the children—working like a dog over this strike; and, like enough, the most he'll do is to get himself out of a job—and when he's been fired, maybe the rest of 'em will stay right on and pick the hops. You can't get folks like this to stand together."

"All right," I said, putting the coin in my purse. "I'll do the best I can. May I leave Boy here? I hate to take him with me in this heat."

"You shall leave the boy by me," Mrs. Pochin put in. "And I hope you get it, that magnesian and that arrow-root."

I went back into the tent for my parasol, and to tell Boy. I hadn't got halfway down the slope before I saw that I had done well not to bring him; the bend of my arm across which the jacket lay was wet with perspiration; I was afraid it would come through my clean shirtwaist, and I must save a decently fresh appearance for the trip. I shifted the coat to the other arm. That morning the path from store to camp was travelled by scores of restless, aimless-seeming figures, and every foot that was set down raised a puff of dust. I found them weaving about in front of the store, while on up the line toward the office, where the committee was to meet Mr. Stanley at ten o'clock, the crowd was still thicker. Everywhere dust settled on little dingy-white Persian and Hindoo turbans, Syrian and Italian head handkerchiefs, the faded blue coolie jackets of Chinese, torn straw hats from the five-and-ten-cent counters, men's overalls, the lank, patched folds of women's gingham dresses; but the perspiring

faces, white, brown or yellow, young and old, all wore the same expression of anxiety and half-nourished hope. I felt almost like a sneak to be leaving them in such an hour.

"Bice!" I called, as I caught sight of a tall form ahead of me. The big man turned, and touched his hat. His black face was streaming, but he looked more wanted and contented in the heat than any white man could. "Bice, is there any chance for me to get over to Corinth with my baggage to-day?"

"Not to-day, madam. It's Sunday. But we have to meet the nine o'clock train to-night, if that will do."

"Nine o'clock. Well, that will have to do," I said. "Can you call for me and the things, up at the camp?"

"Yes, madam. I surely will."

Nine o'clock that night! If it hadn't been so hot, I should have tried walking over. But I couldn't do that, with Boyce already droopy. Anyhow, I must get on to the store now for Mrs. Pochin's errand. My foot was on the step of the porch when I heard my name called, and turned to see Sonya Pochin ducking through the crowd toward me, panting:

"Oh, Mrs. Baird, wait a minute. We want you to meet—we told him——" She caught up to me. "He's been over every ranch in the district now except Las Palmas, and he's going through it to-day. Wait. Here they come. See—there by Vera."

I put down my parasol. There were others with Vera, pickers in their Sunday clothes, but the tall figure nearest her, immaculate in all that heat and dust, a light coat over the silk-shirted arm, a straw hat carried, looked like a visitant from Coronado. This must be the man from the Bureau of Labour at Washington. As we waited, he stopped at a low roadster that I had noticed standing beside the way, stowed some papers in its pockets, and turned to come on. Then, at a flash, in spite of time and change, I saw who it was. I stood there, just blunt and stupid.



"HOW WAS IT—WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, JOE?" I
ASKED. "WE'VE BEEN SO UNEASY ABOUT YOU"

Sonya's "Joe said you went to school with him. We *didn't* want you to miss him. Oh, he's so wonderful! Should you have known him again? Of course not," came vaguely to my ears.

Should I have known him again? Yes, instantly, in this world or any other—this could be nobody but Philip. The next dizzy moment I was shaking hands with him, and he was saying that he had seen Boyce up at the camp and the child looked like me.

There isn't anything to tell about such a meeting as that. I don't know what I said, how I acted, or much about how anybody else there acted. The poor little instant of time had enough to do to bridge the gulf between this steady-eyed man and the battling, outlawed boy I had last seen.

There came to me—trying to get hold of myself and appear reasonably composed—a curious, fleeting remembrance of Frank Hollis Dale at his haughtiest, charging up and down the room, spitting out those scornful criticisms of our western crudeness. Well, here was no crudeness. This was a man to stand comparisons.

Looking at him, I knew in what spirit he had demanded and taken from his parents those four lavishly supplied years of eastern culture. And, man or boy, a successful figure on his own, or a son in rebellion, Philip was not the kind of person you'd enjoy exhibiting your failures before. Back there in Miss Chandler's room, how I had winced to hear that, after all these years, he had got his first direct word of me from so discreditable a source. But here I was now face to face with him—a hop picker on his father's ranch! It seemed to me that his own manner was perfect, unconscious, exactly right—just the way he should have treated an old friend whom he had not seen for years. Perhaps his very composure and rightness it was that first choked me past speech and then set me off saying:

"I'm leaving Las Palmas. Boyce isn't well. We're going as soon as we can get away."

"Oh," cried Vera, "we'll miss you awfully! But, of course, you ought to go if you can." She stole a side glance at Philip. "Children have got no business in a place like this. They're all getting sick."

"Leo's worse," Sonya broke in. "When we came past the house mother said you were going to try to get some things for him, Mrs. Baird. Did you have any luck?"

"I was just going to try," I said, glad of the interruption. We faced around toward the store, and there was Milt Stanley stepping out, pulling the big doors together preparatory to locking them.

"Did you want Milt? Is there anything I can do?" The courteous helpfulness of Philip's manner reproved the jerky coldness of mine and increased my confusion. With an incoherent "Never mind," I left him standing there with the Pochin girls, the idle, uneasy, waiting crowd watching me as I went toward the store door.

"Stop a minute, please, Milt," I said. "I want to get——"

Milt checked the key he was about to pull out and looked over his shoulder, past me, to Philip. You never saw a man so staggered.

"Well!" he said, blankly. "Where'd you drop from, Phil?"

"Good-morning," came the perfectly colourless response. "Callie wants something, Milt."

"Callie wants——" Mr. Stanley's brother and the manager of Las Palmas ranch turned his nervous attention to me. "Well, what is it?"

"Things for some sick children up at camp." Still flustered, he unlocked and threw open the door. "Have you got arrowroot and magnesia?"

"Nuh." He kept looking past me at Philip.

"Let me use the 'phone, then. I'll see if I could get them in Corinth."

The grinning, observant crowd in the store porch listened while he quibbled:

"It's Sunday. Groceries wouldn't be——"

"The store I'd want would be open on Sunday," I said, impatiently. "I'll just see if I can get these things."

"What good'll that do?" Plainly the crowd worried him. "Say, come in—just you and Phil," he suggested.

I drew back; Milt stood uncertain in the middle of the doorway; Philip passed over an awkward moment by saying, easily:

"Can I do the 'phoning for you, Callie? Give me your list; I'll attend to it."

Here was the test. The crowd stopped grinning as Milt made his declaration:

"Not over the store 'phone. I told her it wouldn't do any good. Even if it wasn't Sunday—we don't allow the Corinth storekeepers to deliver on the ranch."

"Yah!" came a voice from the roadway. "Now you got it!"

"You don't what!" Philip ejaculated, coldly.

"Don't let any grocer's wagon from Corinth—or anywhere else—on this ranch," repeated Milt, doggedly. "Those are the orders," he added, trying to speak with dignity, but breaking down into a hurried, "I'll get the stuff for them some way, Phil. Give me that list."

"A doctor, too," I put in, and they cheered me. It made Milt mad. He forgot Philip for the moment, and began, querulously:

"Now, see here, Callie Boyce; you're taking too much on yourself. There's no sickness in the camp. I can't call a doctor for folks that'll never pay him. Ten chances to one, if I did call him, he wouldn't come."

I was a little surprised that Philip answered that; his tone was low, but those in the porch kept very still to hear him.

"Your position's not legal, Milt," he said. "You can't

do that. You'd better let her order what they need over your 'phone—or you order it for her, here and now."

"*I—I'd better?*" Milt spluttered. "I've got no authority. Talk to your father about it." He came out, pulled the door shut, locked it, and dropped the key in his pocket. He held his head down and wouldn't look at anybody. "Talk to your father," he repeated.

"Where'll I find him at this time of the morning?" asked Philip. "Have they gone to church yet?"

"No. That da—the pickers' committee's to meet him at the office at ten. He'd be there by now."

"Stanley's meetin' the committee!" Instantly the whole crowd surged up the line toward the office in a solid mass. Somewhere along the way I lost sight of Milt; when we got to the foot of the steps the Pochin girls were not near me. Our numbers, added to those already in front of the little frame building, made a jam. Philip got halfway up the steps, and turned back for me. I could see through the open door and windows Father Abraham, Paul Cluett, Barney Monroe and the others inside there, looking dreadfully strung up and excited.

"No—no," I called to Philip; "I'll not come. I'd only be in the way."

He held out his hand toward me, and was speaking. I couldn't hear what he said for the talking and moving all about. But those back of me pushed me on. I was inside the office when Mr. Stanley's car finally came down the drive, stopped at the steps, and he and his constable got out. Brockaw, ahead, was between Philip and his father. The elder Stanley, as fine-looking as ever, and as carefully dressed, his hair a little greyer than when I had last seen him, was almost at the doorway when, looking across Brockaw's shoulder, he saw his son. He stopped short in his tracks, and seemed to forget about the committee that was waiting for him.

"Well, Philip," he said, "this is a surprise. Have you been up to see your mother yet?"

"Good-morning, sir." There was no offence in Philip's tone, but I could see Mr. Stanley stiffen as that uncompromising "sir" came out. Then his eye reached me, and lighted fierily. He hardly seemed to hear as his son went on:

"I didn't come to see mother, or yourself, this time. I'm not on your ranch as a visitor. I came——"

"I can see what you came for," the older voice cut him off; "I don't need to be told," pushing past him toward Barney and the others. "These gentlemen friends of yours, too?" over his shoulder, sarcastically. "You mixed up in this business?"

Waiting for no answer, still with his back to Philip, confronting the committee with angry contempt, he jerked a long envelope out of his side pocket and tossed it over on the desk by the window.

"There's your paper," he said. "I've read it."

Dead silence. Then:

"What are you going to do for us?" Paul Cluett asked.

"Do?" Mr. Stanley had plainly studied that despised list of demands, for he named and answered them in order. "Free drinking water!" he snorted. "The wells *are* free. A clean camp! How's any employer to get it or keep it for a herd of tramps? I'll do my part toward cleaning up the camp. We'll see what you'll do. More pay?" His voice sharpened. "Las Palmas is giving the right rate for picking. You'll not get another cent out of me—not a cent."

It seemed to me I couldn't bear to stand there and look on at the defeat and humiliation I saw coming to the committee that poor, bent, old Father Abraham had left a helpless, scared wife and sick children to serve on. I turned and tried quietly to get out. By the time I brought up a

little nearer the door, but wedged in tighter than ever, black little Barney Monroe was demanding:

"That's the word we get, is it? We've asked three things; two of them you turn down cold, do you? We can tell our people that, huh?"

"If you was to clean up, when would you do it, anyhow?" Cluett asked. "When would we get the common human decencies for that camp and for the fields?"

"When I can get the lumber and the workmen," snapped Mr. Stanley.

"That's no more than you promised me three days ago—that's nothing," said Monroe.

"Your camp's in a hell of a fix for garbage service," Cluett went steadily on, as though no one else had spoken. "You could give us that to-morrow—to-day—if you wanted to. The sump holes around the wells are swarming with blue flies——"

"Blue flies?" Mr. Stanley checked himself in the motion of putting on one of his auto gloves. He dragged it off and stood with it grasped in his hand, repeating, "Blue flies?"

"Yes, sir," Cluett answered. "Some of 'em butchered a sheep up there day before yesterday; the offal's lying yet in the sun. The entrails——"

"Butchering!—in camp! Making a slaughter house of the place!" broke in Mr. Stanley. "I'll not have that. I've put men off the ranch for less."

"They've been pickin' your hops at ninety cents a hundred," Cluett said, heavily. "They had to keep at it from dark to dark to earn a livin' wage. 'N yet we like to eat meat once in a while, same as you do. They butchered. 'N you didn't give us any garbage service or camp boss. Now you seem to think it's funny we'd strike."

Mr. Stanley stood breathing hard, surveying the committee he had agreed to meet. To me, the very seams in the back of his coat showed an acute consciousness of

Philip there within hearing; his son at hand to criticise his methods, perhaps to see him worsted. Again silence—an aching silence—waited on what he would say when he spoke.

“Strike!” He jumped at the word as though it were what he had been watching for. “Do you fellows think you can stay on this place and stir up a strike, right before my eyes?”

“Sir, already we have——”

It was as far as Father Abraham got.

“You’re discharged,” Mr. Stanley bellowed at him—at the entire committee. “Get off my ranch.”

“You can’t make that stick,” said Cluett. “We’ve all paid our rent. We can live here as long as we——”

“We can die here!” cut in Monroe, fiercely. “The camp’s a hell. We’ll have a run of typhoid inside a week. We’ve got half a dozen sick children up there now.”

“That’s a lie, Barney, and you know it,” Milt Stanley whooped in from the roadway. Through the window I could see his thin, red, anxious face raised subserviently toward his older brother in the office. “It’s a lie,” he repeated, but there was no confidence in his tone. “There’s nobody sick in the camp.”

“Oh, Mrs. Baird!” Sonya Pochin’s clawing fingers were at my shoulder. “Tell ’em—tell ’em quick—you were down at the store for medicine and the doctor. Get him to speak for us.” Her big black eyes flashed to Philip, who was just out of her reach. “You can. He’s an old friend.” So far she had whispered; now, in despair, her voice soared out, “Mr. Stanley, your son knows there’s sickness in camp. He’s been through this morning and seen the sick ones.”

The owner of Las Palmas wheeled to the new issue. The furrows of his face began to purple. Once more he seemed to forget everything else in rage at his son. Philip stood with an expressionless countenance, braving him as

I knew he had always braved him in the past while his father raged:

"Don't you attempt to tell me what you saw! On my ranch with no permission—been through my camps without a word to me!"

"See here, sir!" Philip spoke with a detached air, but his voice had deepened a bit. "You know, and every hop grower in your district knows, that I couldn't accomplish what I came for by giving notice and asking permission. It's my business to see these camps as they are and make my report——"

"Your business!" Mr. Stanley fumed. "Your only business on Las Palmas ranch is to meddle and make me trouble. You've been nothing but trouble to me since the day you were born. I never want to see your face again. If you've got any self-respect, you'll get out of here."

Philip looked straight back at him.

"That might suit you," he said, "but I can't leave the biggest labour camp in the district out of my report because it's on your place. I can't report on it without going through it. I did about half my work this morning; I expect to finish this afternoon."

"You expect——" Mr. Stanley choked on his own rage. "Brockaw——"

"Look out, Lucius Stanley," came Cluett's taunt. "You ain't talkin' to a committee of poor devils of strikers now. You're buckin' Washington!"

"Brockaw," Stanley wheeled on him, "these men here, that are making trouble; if they don't leave the ranch, any or all of them, arrest them as—as trespassers."

It sounded as though he included his son with the others. Brockaw, uncertain, pushed forward, bringing up shoulder to shoulder with Philip.

"Uh—uh—arrest now?" he blundered, stupidly.

Philip's attitude was still one of entire unconcern. He looked his father in the face half pityingly, suggesting:

"Well—not without a warrant. You don't run things quite that way on Las Palmas ranch, do you?"

At the check the old jeer broke out between the constable and the pickers he was hired to intimidate. Brockaw's dull face reddened to cries of,

"Watch him crawfish now!"

"Hey, Brocky, better go back to skinning mules!"

With an awkward flourish of the arm the constable jerked out his pistol. It caught in my sleeve.

"Stop him!" screamed Father Abraham. "He'll shoot the girl!"

"Look what you're about, you fool—be careful with that gun!" Philip said to him, contemptuously. My heart leaped when he put himself between me and the constable, but afterwards I wasn't sure he noticed whether it was I or Sonya Pochin who had been in danger.

Brockaw, cowed, confused, went straight on past, a way opening for the weapon in his hand, and letting him through the door. This left Philip and his father confronted. We all watched, fascinated, while Mr. Stanley tried to speak, and couldn't for fury. Then suddenly a kind of convulsion went over his features; his arm shot up, and the heavy auto glove he held slapped Philip across the face.

"Get out of my way!" It was hardly more than a strangled whisper. They couldn't hear it from the roadway; they couldn't see what had happened; but they yelled as he came out to them on the heels of his constable and got into the car. They were yelling still as the car made speed down the road, both occupants turning once and again to look back.

Philip put his hand to the red mark on his cheek. He glanced about sharply, saying:

"I'll ask those who saw that kindly not to mention it outside this room. It could only do harm."

Monroe had sprung on a chair and was craning his neck to watch the automobile off.

"All right, sir. You heard that, boys. Keep your mouths shut. Gawd, we'll have our hands full, anyhow—*they've gone down the Corinth road!*"

"Have they?"

"Lemme see!"

"Look, that's their dust—at the turn there."

"Gone for reinforcements. They'll have the sheriff and his deputies on us before the day's over!"

"We're in for it. Get busy, boys. We've got a right to strike. We'll stand solid on that."

CHAPTER XX

THE RIOT

WELL—it was fight now! The strikers didn't know what to expect; as Cluett had said, they could only "get busy." They poured out of the little office like wasps from a nest that's been shaken, Sonya Pochin right up at the front, talking furiously. In the road they scattered, going from group to group, gesticulating, shouting out just what had happened to the committee, begging, beseeching the pickers to stick together.

"We'll get what we're after, yet," was Monroe's slogan.

"We'll catch hell if we lay down now," Cluett warned.

"Be men. Stand up for your women and your sick children!" Sonya's voice rose shrill above them.

"But no violence—no violence, daughter," Father Abraham came in timorously. "They have gone for the constabulary."

"Sure, no violence!" they jeered all around him. "But not another pound of hops picked till Stanley does the decent thing."

This suddenly left Philip and me practically alone in the office. Certainly nothing could have been further from my intention than to speak as though Philip had done something to save my life. But in the agonising embarrassment that descended on me I found myself doing just that, and in my frantic efforts to flounder out I wound up, "I'm afraid my being here made your father angrier——" and then just choked down to silence in a blind passion of chagrin.

Philip had been looking at me as though he didn't see me. The red mark showed up plain on his cheek, but the fighting glare with which any spirited man will meet a

blow in the face was dying out of his eyes. He even smiled a little as I limped to my miserable, abashed conclusion.

"Oh, no," he said, "you're not to blame, Callie. That's nothing new in the Stanley family. Nice bunch of wild animals—I should think you'd admire them. Well, forget it—I do."

It was one of those wretched moments when the only things that come into your head to say are the things you mustn't say. We moved down the office steps together, Philip starting back for his work as though nothing had happened. We walked side by side as far as his machine—he was off for the fields and the outlying portions of the ranch. I was glad when he lifted his hat and left me.

I went on up to Boyce and the camp, trying feverishly to forget my own inward disturbance in the immediate crash of the affairs of those about me. I couldn't get away from the place till night, and might as well make myself of use and do what I could for those who were worse off than I was.

I had to take Boy with me on some of my errands; about two o'clock he went to sleep, which was a relief, though he woke up cross and feverish. There was nothing to be got for the sick children; we had to do the best we could with thickened milk and browned flour. Joe Ed, who said he was "no sea-lawyer," did not take part in the arguing and agitating, but worked like a nailer helping us women. Philip had got back and was evidently giving the camp a final going over. Now and again we got sight of him, a crowd always at his heels, an interpreter beside him when needed. Quietness and confidence and strength went with him wherever he was. I couldn't get over the wonder of it—that this should be the spoiled, irresponsible boy I had last seen.

As we worked, I began to realise that Joe Ed had something on his mind, and at last it came out.

"I'm glad I got my tip from Louisiana Lou about the man in the case. It's duly filed for reference." He set down the bucket of water I had asked for, glanced at me swiftly, then looked away. "I don't suppose you've been losing any sleep considering that dazzling offer of mine, made in good faith and in the public square at San Vicente some months ago, but I've been kind of hanging on to that idea—at times. I'll drop it now."

"Oh, Joe Ed, don't be ridiculous," I remonstrated, my face stinging with the humiliation I had been trying to forget. "There's no man in the case. Of course, I knew you weren't in earnest that evening. You were just excited——"

"And a drink ahead," he supplied. "Say it. You thought, as Barney says, 'it was the liquor talking,' did you? Well, it wasn't. When you're hanging up your scalps, you can count mine. I don't say I ever had any hope—but it just wasn't in me to resist the impulse."

All day, off and on, there had been singing and speaking at the dance platform. Now, about five o'clock, the biggest crowd they'd had was gathering. Everybody who wasn't over there seemed to be on the way.

"Let's us go—bring the kid and come on," said Joe.

"I want to go," Boyce put in, fretfully, and we started. Halfway there we overtook Bice. I stopped to speak to him. The strike had tied up his wagon, as well as everything else.

"I can carry the things over for you," he offered.

"Yes," Joe Ed settled it, "we can pack your stuff to Corinth—it'll be cool after dark—if we're not all in jail before that time."

Bice went on with his great swinging stride; Joe and I followed more slowly. Boy caught sight of a child up on the platform that he knew, let go my hand, and before I could stop him had dodged under elbows and worked his way till he stood just in front of the speaker.

When we got into that crowd of two thousand hop pickers, nearly half of them women and children, who knew nothing about going on strike, I felt the queer thrill that made it different from any other gathering of people. Barney Monroe's hoarse, tired voice slugging away with undiminished passion, the nervous strain of those who listened, it was like a revival meeting.

"If we're men," Barney yelled, huskily, "we'll strike; we'll refuse to pick these hops till Stanley's met our conditions; we'll take care of our women and children. If we're mice, we'll give up to let them work in this kind of a hell. See here"—he reached down suddenly, swung Boy up and held him high—"it's for the kids we're striking. It's for them."

"Joe," I whispered, catching his arm and shaking it, "if they bring in officers on these people, there'll be bloodshed."

"Sure not," he cried; "not in a hundred years. Don't you go getting scared again. Nobody here's armed. There's no talk of fight."

"I'm not scared," I said, still speaking low. "I wasn't scared last night."

"Then what was the matter?"

"Oh—I'd just found that Lucius Stanley owns this ranch. That was the first time I'd seen him—and his wife. It upset me. Long ago—when I was living in Stanleyton—we had—there was something unpleasant——"

"I understand," said Joe Ed. "By the way, where is He? Gone?"

We both looked around, and Joe answered his own question, with:

"There he is."

Coming along the well-path, some papers and books in his hand, moving with the air of a man whose work is completed, I saw Philip.

Again I experienced that curious stoppage of the faculties. The big crowd seemed unreal. The noises dwindled. Vaguely I knew that there was a call for singers, and that Joe Ed had left me to respond to it. A voice up there cried out:

"Sing—sing 'Mr. Block.'"

I saw Joe Ed spring high on the musicians' bench, beckoning and calling to the English boy drawing a bucket of water over at the well. For the first time I had an overwhelming impulse to run away. I looked around for someone to bring Boyce down. On the instant Philip came through the fringes of the crowd and spoke to me.

"I'm glad I found you, Callie. I didn't want to go without saying good-bye."

"Good-bye," I said, mechanically, and put out a limp hand.

"Where's the boy?" he asked, like any other friend.

"Up there." I indicated the platform. "I was looking for someone to get him down for me."

"I'll go and fetch him," and he was pushing his way up the steps.

When he was gone I became aware of a curious stir and grumbling among the people back of me. I twisted around to look. At first I couldn't see anything for the crowd. Then I caught a glimpse of an automobile coming across the field. There were men in it. The sawed-off barrels of repeating shotguns showed above their shoulders.

"For God's sake, look at the pump guns!" yelled a voice. The crush about me swayed; I saw a second car, also full of men. It seemed ridiculous, impossible, but one of the figures beside Mr. Stanley on the back seat was Harvey Watkins. Milt and Brockaw were in front. I turned toward the stand. When I finally could see anything of Boy, Philip had him, and waved reassuringly. I looked back in the direction of the motors. They had stopped at the edge of the crowd; the men in the first one

jumped down and tried to make their way in to the platform. Two of them drew clubs and began striking right and left into the press as they came.

"Look at that damned sheriff and his deputy," groaned a voice beside me, as the man ahead shouted:

"I call upon this meeting to disperse!" The crack of his club on someone's head emphasised the words.

The full terror of the situation came to me where I stood wedged in, unable to get either forward or back. Then a shot roared out—fired, they said afterward, by an officer on the outskirts, over the heads of the crowd, to intimidate them.

Intimidate? It maddened them. It was the opening crash of a horrible bedlam. I was shoved along in the yelling rush toward the platform steps, up which the officers were fighting their way. Back in Mr. Stanley's automobile somebody was standing up shouting, "Keep the peace, boys—keep the peace!" I got sight of Philip bringing Boy, arms clutched tight around the neck of his rescuer, face burrowed in against him. They were getting across toward me when, with a splintering crash, the singers' bench broke down, and those who had jumped on it to see better were thrown to their knees in the midst of a howling, fighting mob. My struggle in the direction of the steps had brought me right to the elbow of one of the officers. At the instant I got a second glimpse of Philip's bare head and Boy's little towled poll, this fellow shouted to Brockaw:

"There's your man. You've got the papers now. 'Arrest him!' And he lifted his gun and pointed it straight at those two heads!

I threw myself toward the man as well as I could for the hampering bodies of those about me, clutched at the pointing weapon, came short, clawed for his arm. He cursed me, and turned the gun on me. But I was past terror. Let it be that, then—let it be that! My eyes were

closing when a great black arm reached down from the platform across me, caught the gun barrel, wrenched it away, and, as I crouched there staring, there came a roar in my ears like the dissolution of earth, and the man who had threatened me crumpled down the steps among the trampling feet.

Bice dropped the gun and reached for me to lift me up to safety. There was another roar back of me, and a charge of buckshot, fired close at hand, tore open his great brown breast so horribly that, for a moment, the quivering, beating heart was seen. Then he rolled over and over, down out of sight.

Where was Philip? Where was Boy?

With a rush the officers had finally gained the platform. There they fought and stamped, jerking Father Abraham from the box he had been standing on, hustling him forward to the steps. They got handcuffs on him and on Monroe. Again and again shots sounded. At one of them the man who had been standing up in the Stanley auto, with his futile "Keep the peace, boys—keep the peace," fell headlong.

Then suddenly the whole crowd on the platform seemed to surge forward and down the steps, stumbling on the dead men that lay there. Somebody caught me round the waist and hauled me to one side. It was Sonya; Philip was behind her with Boy. The three of us went with the running mass till the press thinned a bit and we could halt.

"Muvver! Muvver!" Boyce was crying.

"Yes, young man, mother's here." Philip shifted the child in his arms as we stood and looked.

The officers, with their prisoners, were fighting a way back to the empty auto. Paul Cluett came running from down the road somewhere—he had not been at the meeting at all. They met him, handcuffed him, and took him along.

The Stanley car with Mr. Stanley and Harvey Watkins in it, and Milt driving, had instantly picked up their man who had been shot, and, backing swiftly out of the crowd, speeded away up toward the palm avenue. Half a dozen were down, on the steps of the platform and near there. Men, women, children, were crouching, screaming, or running and nursing wounds.

"Oh, look!" wailed Sonya. There in front of us on the well-path the English boy lay, his pail of water overturned beside him. She stooped to see. "They've killed him," she cried. "He's dead."

The camp was a wretched place, but it was the only refuge those who had been at the meeting had. Some terrified souls were running toward the fields; a few distracted figures flying right down the open road; but most of them turned instinctively to their shacks and tents. We moved in that direction, Philip still carrying Boyce. The tents were emptying out every living thing in them except those too sick to move. They came screeching, mad with terror. Little old Mrs. Pochin, her grey hair flying, ran up to us.

"Where is your father—and Bernie—and Ambrose? Have they killed your father? Have they taken him?"

"Yes—they took father." Sonya caught hold of the little shaking creature and steadied her. "But our men are not done fighting yet—see there."

Down the road toward the store, at the plunging run of a very scared man, went Brockaw, a half-dozen strikers after him.

"Oh, they've got nothing but sticks and stones. What can they do against guns?"

Brockaw reached the store, scuttled around to its back, ran in and barricaded himself. The strikers battered at the doors and windows.

Among those that came with us or streamed past us toward the camp were a great many—men, women and

children—with gunshot wounds. They dragged themselves along, were helped, or carried. One man, his whole arm torn off by a bunched charge of buckshot, was bleeding frightfully. When those who carried him came up with us, Philip passed Boy to me and stopped them. I left him there helping to rig a tourniquet. The whistling breath and great wrenching groans of the wounded man sounded after us as we went on.

Meek, quiet, efficient little Mrs. Pochin was like a crazed thing. Those of us who kept some remnant of our wits about us had our hands full. Nobody that I asked knew anything of Joe Ed; the last seen of him was just before the singers' bench went down. When we looked back toward the scene of the riot, there was the second automobile getting away, with its one dead man, and the remaining officers. Our dead—Bice and the English boy—were being carried past the Pochin shack and to the stockade. We heard the strikers hallooing to those who still hammered at Brockaw's stronghold, yelling at them to come and help, and let the constable go.

The sun went down on that bare, desolate, low hilltop; the shadows gathered over the blood and tears and dismay of a beaten, leaderless horde. It seemed that doctors must be got for these wounded; yet there wasn't a man among the strikers who would dare show his face in Corinth that night. Mountains rolled off my heart when Philip, who had stayed so far to help these poor creatures, came in where Mrs. Monroe and I were bandaging the bullet-shattered hand of that ten-year-old boy who used to put records on the phonograph of an evening, and told us that he would send medical help from Corinth.

"Will they come—to us—from Corinth?" Mrs. Monroe asked, without looking up.

"I'll find someone who will," he answered, as briefly, "whether it's from Corinth, or further on."

He went out, and the sounds of his motor slowly died

away. The dark hours that followed didn't seem like a night at all. They were full of activity—strange, furtive activity—scared creatures stumbling about the camp, afraid to have you offer them a lantern, skulking like guilty things to hunt up their belongings and their people. They didn't know who they'd run against—a friend or an officer of the law. The wounded moaned; every now and then a frightened woman would scream out, startled, or there would be a muttered masculine exclamation and the sound of shuffling feet. Through it all was the fretful cry of sick children who had to be neglected.

There were more than two thousand pickers on Las Palmas ranch; nearly all of them had been at the meeting. Now the timid ones, who had never had any hope in the strike, who were willing to make any sort of terms, anxious to stay and hold their jobs in whatever conditions, came creeping in from the fields, or wherever they had harboured during the riot, crawled into tents and shacks, shut the doors or pulled the flaps together, and lay there breathlessly silent, taking no part in what we had to face.

The worst of our work was our ignorance; we didn't know whether what we did was right or wrong. The boy with the shattered hand was motherless; his father had been arrested. The child soon became delirious; then he screamed till I thought I should go out of my mind. Mrs. Monroe was keeping Boy with her children. Sonya Pochin and I were down at the further end of the camp, trying to see if we could do anything for the man who had lost his arm. It seemed as though he would die of shock.

"Would you go look again, Mrs. Baird?" Sonya whispered. "I thought I heard a motor quite a while ago."

I went and stood at the tent door. There was no wind, but a queer little whispering, moving sound kept up through all the camp. Here and there the dimly luminous walls of a tent showed where the sick were. In one of the stockades a match would flash up behind the burlap walls, and be put out quickly; but there was never a gleam in

the big black shadow over by the tule shelters beside the dry slough where the Orientals hid themselves from this war of an alien race.

I saw a light moving along from the direction of the dance platform. As it came nearer I could make out Dolph Flegel, carrying a lantern in front of three men—Philip and a stranger, with Joe Ed, white and sick-looking, his left arm in a sling, walking between them.

"Is that the doctor?" Sonya called, softly. "Here's where he's wanted."

"Yes—and Joe Ed!" I cried.

As they came up, I stepped aside to let the stranger pass in and Philip went with him. Joe Ed dropped down on a soap box at the tent door and sat there a moment, panting.

"Wounded on the field of battle," he said, looking down at his bandaged arm with a ghost of his old jauntiness.

"How was it—where have you been, Joe?" I asked. "We've been so uneasy about you—nobody seen you."

"Got pitched off the platform when the bench broke down. Five or six fell on top of me, busted this wing, and kicked me plumb back out of sight in the scramble. I didn't know anything for quite some time. Stanley and the doctor found me sitting up trying to remember who I was, and what had happened."

"A broken arm—that's pretty bad—but I'm glad it's no worse. Does it hurt very much?"

"Not very—feels sort of funny. My head's a little queer yet. I'll be all right—in the morning. I'm going to take you and the kid home to-morrow—and that's a cinch."

"Sonya!" somebody hissed from the dark, and Mrs. Pochin's haggard little face showed up suddenly in the shine of Dolph's lantern. "Ah-h!" She shrank a little; then, seeing who we were, "Is Sonya here?"

For answer I pointed inside.

"Tell her, please, we go now. I get at last Ambrose

and Bernie, and all the children. Vera and I, we pack up. We go—just walking away on our feet—down the road—in the dark. We carry it that things what we got. Tell Sonya she shall come.”

I stepped inside, beckoned Sonya, and Philip came out with us. Mrs. Pochin was speaking to Joe Ed.

“Best is you stay in our house to-night. That boy can bring your blankets over. It is, anyhow, better than the stockade—with no roof—the dew falls heavy to-night—the dead are laid out there.”

“Heh—Bice and English!” sighed Joe Ed, heavily, getting to his feet. “Thank you, ma’am. I reckon I had better get down,” and the four of them started; Philip walked quietly beside me.

“Callie,” he spoke in a lowered tone, “I suppose you realise that we’ll all be detained here as witnesses?”

“Oh!” I pulled up in dismay. “Shall we? I hadn’t thought of anything like that!”

“Yes,” he said; then, indicating the group ahead, “It’s what they’re running away from. It’s a bad move on their part—poor things; they’ll only be dragged back—and jailed.”

“You’re sure——” I began, haltingly—“but, of course.”

“Oh, yes,” said Philip. “The man that was killed in father’s auto was the district attorney—and popular—had been father’s lawyer. Chavez county’s wild. I talked to Watkins over at Corinth. His firm’s acting for Las Palmas now.”

“Yes; I saw Harvey in the car—this afternoon,” I said.

“Well, the inquest’s set for ten o’clock to-morrow morning. I hope you folks can give your testimony and get off on the noon train. Watkins was inclined to be accommodating. I think he’d even take depositions, if the inquest was delayed.”

“I do hope we can get off at noon,” I said. “It would be miserable to be kept here.”

“Miserable,” he repeated. “And, of course, you’ll be

brought back for the trial. So shall I. It's hard luck that I have to testify; of course, father will hold it a personal attack on him. My report hits him hard—and then my being there at the moment of the outbreak. Well, it can't be helped."

I was silent a long time, and finally just said:

"It's too bad."

"Oh, I don't know," he threw it off sharply; "it's better for me that I couldn't get on with father. Look what he's made of Milt. His idea of discipline was always a club."

"Don't you think he—he saw—to-day?" I suggested, hesitantly. There was no hesitation in Philip's,

"No, they haven't learned anything. They were taken by surprise—they didn't think that seasonal workers could get up a genuine strike—but they haven't learned anything. Watkins was there at Corinth, 'phoning to the governor to have the militia called out."

"Soldiers!" I cried, and looked around at the darkened, furtive camp, scared to death, with its dead, its sick and wounded.

"Yes, soldiers," he repeated. "Watkins said they were pretty badly shaken up over there—you notice the house hasn't shown a light yet. They're jolted, but they haven't learned anything. They're still for the strong hand. When they get the militia here they'll run things about as they have been running them. Mother has more brains, but she trusts father's plans because he's got rich by them; she's seen them succeed—so far. After all, she belongs to the old generation."

I didn't say anything; after a moment he went on:

"Chavez county is dominated by the Hop Growers' Association; Chavez county has had a deputy sheriff and a prosecuting attorney killed by seasonal workers on Las Palmas to-day. Chavez county will support the Stanleys and their methods. But this is the point that may weigh with mother: Chavez county isn't the whole world, or even the state of California, to her. I can't believe but that

she'll writhe under the criticism they've certainly brought on themselves when all the facts are known. I'm not enjoying it myself. It's my name, too, you see. They're my parents."

Ten chances to one Philip wouldn't have encountered his father on Las Palmas to-day at all but for me. He wouldn't have been struck in the face; he wouldn't have been at the dance platform when the killings occurred, except that he was trying both times to do something for me. He hadn't tried to avoid me—he was showing himself most kind—but surely he must feel that I had never brought him anything but ill luck. I would have liked to say something of this, but I couldn't find the words. There was silence till we came up with the others. Mrs. Pochin and Sonya hardly stopped for whispered good-byes, and went straight on. Joe Ed, without a word, walked into their house and lay down; Dolph Flegel started over to the stockade for Joe's blankets.

"Well, Callie," said Philip, when it came to good-night, "I'll do anything I can to help out to-morrow. I hate to see you let in for all this, just because you chose the Stanley ranch to pick hops on."

"I didn't!" I cried. "I never knew till last night who owned Las Palmas—and I was trying to get away this morning."

There was a brief silence; then,

"I see," he said, slowly.

"I didn't pay enough attention to where I was going when I left San Vicente," I said. "I was just sort of running away, I guess, from something. The Poinsettia—you know—she was there."

"Oh!" His tone was startled. "*That* poor thing. She did make it, then. Well, I'm glad she's safe."

He went on down toward where the round eyes of two machines—his and the doctor's—stared through the dark in the vicinity of the dance platform. I was to remember afterward that word of his—"safe."

CHAPTER XXI

SAFE

I WENT and got Boy from Mrs. Monroe's tent and carried him over to mine. He'd had his scare and his big cry at all the shooting and excitement, and, after it, was sleeping soundly. I had got undressed and pulled on the wrapper that I slept in in the camp, when there came a shaking of my tent curtains and a mumbling of my name. It was Dolph Flegel. He cringed as I parted the flaps.

"Don't let that light on me," he said, and his voice shook. "I just come a-past to tell you to get out of here quick as you can. There's going to be an inquest to-morrow. They'll have us all hauled up. That's what the Pochins run away from. Over't the stockade they've been telling me."

"Of course there'll be an inquest to-morrow, Dolph," I said. "It's better for us to stay and give our testimony."

"Huh!" choked Dolph, huskily. "That nigger killed his man right acrost your shoulder. 'F I's you I'd run—I'd never quit running. D'ye want to see the inside of a jail?"

"There's no use running," I said. "We'll only be wanted as witnesses; but, if you run, you're liable to be arrested. Philip Stanley says——"

"Huh!" he broke in on me. "'Course the old man ain't goin' to do anything to *him*! I'll trust to my own legs."

"Dolph, you'll be caught," I said. "And it'll be the worse for you."

"I won't never be caught in the world. I think you're a fool for stayin'. Well, I've warned you," and he went blundering away in the dark, with a clumsy pack on his shoulder.

After that, for some hours I slept the sleep of dead weariness. I waked suddenly in the grey dawn to the clink of metal, the sound of marching feet. I stole to my tent door and peered out. Down at the big gate the militia were coming in, wheeling from the road in formation, guns over their shoulders, marching knee-deep in a sluggish layer of fog.

An hour later, when I was making some sort of breakfast for Boyce and Joe Ed and myself, they were pitching their tents on a nice little hill back of the ranch house, within easy reach of those better wells which had been too far away for the use of the miserable pickers. Strange how little visible reminder there was of yesterday's riot. The people were very quiet and watchful, cooking their breakfasts; the empty tents and shacks showed up now; yet it was still a labour camp, and those in it were listening for any sound that would tell us that the engine had started at the drying kilns, looking for any movement of wagons toward the field. It was significant that there was no staring over at the soldiers, no loud mention of their presence.

Down around the office men in khaki uniforms changed the look of things more. Milt, the only Stanley in sight, was directing some lumber wagons toward the camp; a few men with hoes, rakes and shovels marched after. They were hustling round to do a little bit of hasty cleaning. Philip hadn't come over from Corinth yet. Harvey made a favour of taking our depositions for the coroner, though I knew that Philip had asked it. I thanked Harvey; he never once looked straight at me; Boyce, rather to my surprise, paid no attention to him. We gave our addresses, so that we could be summoned for the preliminary hearing, and were allowed to go. There were quite a number of persons leaving just as we were; the big stage that had been sent over was almost full.

It seemed queer to be regarded as dangerous or crim-

inal, but all Corinth was in a bubble of terror over what had happened at Las Palmas that Sunday afternoon, and when our stage got to the station it was rather like the Black Maria arriving with prisoners. I saw Mrs. Eccles's son-in-law with his entire family in the round-eyed crowd that had gathered to gape at us. Boy saw them, too; they didn't half enjoy his hallooing to them, and answered with cold repression.

I suppose Joe Ed, with his wounded arm, figured as a particularly dangerous outlaw. They stared after us when we went into the station to telegraph the Poinsettia. It made quite a sensation when, just before our train got in, Philip drove up in his roadster, shook hands with us, and stayed to see us safely aboard.

We got into San Vicente about two o'clock, Joe, his coat off the left side, drawn so as to cover and protect the bandaged arm, trying still to make a joke of everything. I was ashamed that there wasn't a smile left in me to answer his gallant effort. It was like getting back home after a war. It seemed strange that the town should be just as I had left it last Wednesday! Boy was lively; he noticed everything. It was he who, when the taxi we had to have on Joe's account turned into Arbolado street, called out:

"Oh, see the funny wagon at our house. What kind of wagon is that, Muvver?"

It was an auto hearse drawn up in front of the Poinsettia. Other motors ranged down that side of the street. The doors and windows were open; people stood about on the sidewalk, and there was quite a crowd gathered across the way, watching.

"Oh," I gasped, "it—it's a funeral!"

Joe Ed was very white, leaning forward and staring. His impudent, irresponsible young countenance looked all at once older.

"What'll I do?" our chauffeur asked, in a lowered tone. "You don't want to go in on her funeral."

He brought his car to a stop and added, "It won't be but a minute now—they're coming out."

A man who sat beside the chauffeur of the hearse got down and went with a sort of solemn briskness toward the front door. Through that front door there emerged, rolling slowly on its wheeled truck, a casket banked and buried in white flowers. The pall-bearers walked on either side; the hand of each man dropped to the massive silver handles of the great box. Two of the undertaker's assistants were following, arms piled with more floral offerings.

"Who——" Joe's voice shook. "Have you any idea who it is?"

"I think—— Look at the pall-bearers," I whispered back. The heavy steel casket was being manœuvred across the sidewalk. At what would have been the right hand of whoever they were carrying walked Judge Hoard, his uncovered grey head bent. Across from him was the senior McBride brother; back of him Chester Lawrence, prosecuting attorney of San Vicente county. The eight men were all members of the local bar. Mrs. Hoard, in black, and others whom I knew by sight as distant relatives or old friends of Miss Chandler's, were taking the first car behind that of the pall-bearers.

"What they doin', Muvver?" Boy's voice recalled me to myself. "Why don't we go into our house?"

"We will, in a minute," I answered, mechanically. "Be still, dear."

The undertaker and his assistants were getting people into the waiting cars. We sat where we were while they all came out—Mrs. Thrasher, Mrs. Tutt and Ermentrude, little Miss Creevy, all tremulous and shaken-looking; Mr. Martin alone (I suppose his wife wasn't able to walk yet), and, finally, Rosalie—evidently "covering" the occasion for the "Clarion," her face the only one in sight that did not wear that curious air of make-believe and super-solemnity with which we helplessly confront death. She turned

to speak to Mrs. Tipton, who followed and stood bare-headed on the top step.

"*There's mother!*" Joe Ed drew a great breath of relief.

"*There's Orma, too,*" Boy prompted. I could see even from this distance that the girl's face was reddened and swollen by tears.

The hearse started on slowly; the other cars fell in behind; the crowd lingered, looking after, staring over at the Poinsettia, twos and threes of them with heads close together exchanging comments. A huckster's wagon turned the corner back of us; he was passing the house calling, "Watermel-loons! Watermel-loons! Watermel-loons! and nice, fraish canteloups!" as we finally got to the curb and Mrs. Tipton and Orma came down to us. Our telegram had arrived; we were expected. They knew of Joe Ed's injury—and supposed that we had known of the funeral, seeing it in the papers.

I hadn't thought Joe Ed could move like that, with a broken arm. He was on the sidewalk before the wheels had well stopped turning, had the one good arm around his mother, and had fairly lifted her off her feet. I didn't hear a word between them; I don't believe any was spoken; but their faces were enough.

"Howdy, Cal." It was Rosalie who poked up a hand as I was getting out of the taxi. "Say—it's a relief to see you here alive after what we've been hearing about the Hopfield riots."

The house seemed very strange, all emptied and solemn and silent that way. I noticed with a little contraction of the heart a pale face looking from an upstairs window—Miss Chandler's window. As I glanced up, Mrs. Martin bowed slightly to me; Julia, brown and solemn, looked over her shoulder. She had evidently helped the old lady to that point so she could see the departure of the funeral.

"You're to have the bungalow, Mrs. Baird," Mrs. Tip-

ton said. "Let the man take your suit-case round there for you. Orma can carry Eddy's things up to his room."

The chauffeur had already started down the tunnel with my bag, Boy at his heels, when a buggy came lathering up with two women in it—Mrs. Eccles driving; beside her, Delia, a monstrous floral pillow in her lap.

"Oh—am I too late?" she demanded, hardly seeming to notice who we were. "Did Mr. Watkins get here? Well, of all things—to be late for a funeral!"

"How do you do, Mrs. Baird?" Mrs. Eccles pronounced, in her reproving tone. It drew Delia's attention to me, and she fluttered:

"Oh, Foncie—I didn't see you at first. Did you come back for Gene Chandler's funeral?" Then, without waiting for any answer, "We'd have been in plenty of time if that old florist hadn't kept us waiting—or we'd had Harvey with his car to bring us when we did get the pillow. Isn't it a beauty?" she reared it a bit in her lap so we could see the word "Peace" on it. The fantastic thought crossed my mind that it ought to have been "Safe" instead.

"Why not follow on down Fortieth street?" Mrs. Tipton's little silvery tones suggested. "A funeral procession moves very slowly. I should think you could easily overtake them."

"I believe I will," Delia debated. "I can't bear to not have it used." She lowered her tone. "It cost——"

Mrs. Eccles started the old horse with a jerk. I don't know to this day what Delia's pillow cost her.

We saw mother and son shoulder to shoulder going up to the front steps of the Poinsettia, then Rosalie and I started for the bungalow.

"You look sort of bowled over," Rosalie began in that familiar drawl of hers as soon as we were alone. "This the first you heard about it?"

"Yes," I said.

"I guess you've been too busy to read the papers," she was diving into that reticule which she called her war bag as she spoke. "We ran her picture yesterday." She brought out a copy of the usual Sunday "Clarion," folded to show a cut of Miss Chandler on the front.

"An overdose of medicine taken by mistake has fatal results," she read from the opening paragraph below it.

"Oh," I said, "that was it."

Rosalie looked at me, her head on one side, her fine dark eyes a bit derisive.

"Sounds better than suicide. She fixed it so her friends could *say* the other, anyhow. Saved her face. It's what I'd do. If ever I get to where I can't go on, Cal, you just look for me to fix up a plausible theory for the coroner—it's only decent."

"Rosalie——" I began, after a moment's hesitation—"what makes you think that she'd got to where she couldn't go on?"

"Used to lots of money," said Rosalie. "Been spending her capital. It's all gone. Life isn't worth living to that sort of folks without money, and plenty of it. It's her affair. She had the right to quit—anyway she wanted to. Say—tell me about the riots."

I paid the chauffeur; we went in to where Boy was coasting about the rooms in mute admiration of our new quarters. I gave Rosalie the main points of what I had seen at Las Palmas.

"Gosh Almighty!" she kept ejaculating. "Gosh Almighty!" Then, "That's big stuff, Cal. Lord, that's big." She sniffed contemptuously. "Doesn't sound much like the slop we ran in the 'Clarion.' But of course we're always on the side of the dirty sneaks. Your friend Harvey Watkins—husband of the lady with the pillow that 'cost'—is attorney for the Stanleys. He got Bill on long distance Sunday night and filled him up to the neck. You'd have thought the hop pickers were cannibals. Well, so

long, honey. It's awfully good to have you back here safe and sound—and this young'un of yours—he grows like a weed."

She swooped down on Boy near the door, pulled him around and gave him a little thump which he liked instead of the kiss a small boy is apt to be dodging when an admiring woman grabs him. "I'm going to come some afternoon and get you two and take you to a movie," she declared as she left.

How good and usual and commonplace it all seemed!
'And Miss Chandler was safe.

CHAPTER XXII

MAN'S JUSTICE

RIGHT there in that little wistaria-wrapped bungalow of Frank Hollis Dale's, the lovely place I had stared at so wistfully from my one window the first morning in San Vicente, I lived for the next six months. When the rains came, Boyce tracked in mud over that kitchen linoleum I had seen our celebrity washing up. My typewriter sat where his used to sit; I plugged away at its keys, facing the historic spot where Dr. Rush had knocked him sprawling.

For now that I didn't try so hard, success came to me. To put it in a few words, long ago I had suggested to Dr. Rush popular articles on medical subjects, written just in the vivid, spontaneous way that he talked. He took up the idea, dictated the stuff to me, let me get it into the form I had planned for him, made a hit with it, gave me lots of credit, and I soon had the job of helping him revise, recast, and make ready the manuscript for a book publisher. I was to read the proofs. Dr. Rush was as pleased and excited as a boy over this success in a new line. He treated me like a partner, telegraphed me twice about the matter while I was up in Corinth at the trial.

My work with him led to other work. I was offered a part-time position at the Normal—visiting secretary—that paid very well indeed. It was easy for me to keep Boy with me, in kindergarten for the mornings, and with a schoolgirl to look after him when I couldn't be at home afternoons. A year and a half ago, when I faced the question of running away, as I stood in the dark in the dusty side yard of the ranch up at Meaghers, and felt as though I were about to jump over a cliff, I should have thought

such a situation as this heavenly. I had pulled through, on the straight road. I was modestly successful, respected by my immediate world.

At Las Palmas, we heard how the hops were picked, with militia to overawe the pickers. No inquiry was made into the death of the English boy. He was buried in the potter's field at Corinth, and nobody knew any name to put on the pine headboard above him. Money was spent like water on private detectives who raked and combed the country about for fugitive strikers. The entire legal machinery of Chavez county, dominated by the Hop Growers' Association, seemed to have been turned over to the enterprise of getting them to trial, putting them behind bars.

They caught poor Dolph early. Very quickly the Corinth jail was crowded with witnesses and suspects, who sweltered there through months, and shivered there through later months, many of them to be dismissed in the end, discovered to know absolutely nothing about the riots. From the first the eager detectives had a free hand with them, and beat and tortured in the cells to extort confession. Later, when it was all over, a deputy got a year in San Quentin for mauling Dolph almost to death like this. There were several attempts at suicide among the helpless creatures; Father Abraham did kill himself.

Joe Ed and I had to go back to Corinth to testify at the preliminary hearing; later we were up there nearly all of January at the trial that was nationally reported and discussed. For they had made the indictment against Monroe and Cluett murder, and tried to get the same against two others, but failed! Socialists worked with the I. W. W. in a defence league, and retained as lawyer Arnold Llewellyn from San Vicente, devoted, eloquent, a famous fighter in big labour cases on the coast. Independent of this, and just to show what sort of people were on trial, the I. W. W. established what they called a "Jungle" in an old barn in Corinth. Forty youngish men, they lived

there, cooking their own food, one of them who was a tailor putting in his time mending and pressing their clothes so that they could make a good appearance when, day by day, they marched into the courtroom, clean, attentive, serious, a friendly, moral support. Corinth and Chavez county didn't know what to make of it. Even the fact that the "segregated district" never saw one of these men during that time, while the public library was fairly overrun by them, didn't keep the little town from looking at them as a mysterious threat, some new kind of outlaw band.

But what could be done where there was no question of human justice, even of legal justice? Every summer this district had trouble with its seasonal workers; here was its chance to show these drifting hordes, once and for all, that they dared not organise and strike.

The whole experience was to me like walking on hot ploughshares. There were the Stanleys every day in court, having it their own way. She nearly always came, superbly dressed, and sat by her husband, looking on at every thing with that slight smile of hers—the proud, handsome face, the lip of quiet defiance, that repelled me in her, and that I had fairly worshipped in her son. I had to go on the stand, there before them, knowing that my testimony would make them furious at me, proving as it did that Bice had killed both the officers for whose murder Monroe and Cluett were being tried, one when he was attacking me, the other by a wild shot from his gun as he fell. I saw in their faces as I swore to it that they hated me for every word. For from the opening day, when the big city papers everywhere began to print reports, the outside criticism of the Stanleys was free and bitter. Yet in the end they were able to send Barney and Cluett to San Quentin for life, convicted of murder in the face of all testimony. And there was poor, little, shattered Mrs. Pochin, Sonya with her, a ghost of her beautiful self, the rest of the family driven and scattered; Mrs. Monroe worse than widowed,

Barney's two little black-eyed children disgraced orphans—there was plenty to wring my heart.

Even so, why should I have come back from that trial down in the depths, ready to cry all the time? Why couldn't I put its bitterness behind me, and go as I ought with my own affairs. Well, I couldn't; I just drove myself to work that should have been a delight. The minute I was free from it and alone, I'd be fairly drowned in the old misery that I thought I was done with when I married Oliver Baird at seventeen.

Constancy is very much praised; but it seemed to me that I was to be pitied when the sight of Philip in the courtroom, the sound of his voice there, thrilled my heart just as it used to in the Stanleyton schoolroom. Then, I had been made happy by it for all day; but that was more than seven years ago; I had gone through a great deal since that time and got some very bitter knowledge. What had made a poor, ignorant child happy only made me suffer.

Up at Corinth I was on such an emotional strain that I couldn't be natural in Philip's presence, and I would have avoided him. But his testimony was a sensational feature of the trial, and one of the hardest things the prosecution had to meet; under the circumstances, we couldn't help being thrown together, and when we were I was like an intoxicated man, trying to walk straight and talk straight, and hide his condition. I knew I was behaving strangely, because I could see it react on him and puzzle him. Continually on edge, I'd say something curt—almost hateful—to him whenever we met, and then be in an agony to see how he drew back from me and held off from me for awhile.

Each time, I thought surely it was the end. And then we'd be together again, and he would seem to have forgotten his resentment entirely; he would talk to me—look at me—oh, the see-saw of feeling had me nearly crazy!

When the trial was over at last, when I could come home, sick at heart, but at least assured that I hadn't been betrayed into any humiliating revelations, the city papers got hold of the complete story of the early affair between Philip and me, and printed it with all the sentimental flourishes, the cuts of us that they'd run during the trial, placed side by side, and below them such phrases as, "Early romance—Beautiful girl—Cruel parents—More light on the attitude of L. C. Stanley's son in the Chavez county industrial struggle."

I shall never forget the evening that I saw that paper for the first time. I felt so helpless. I read every word as though Philip were reading it. Now it certainly would appear to him that contact with me meant intolerable annoyance and misfortune.

And everybody in the house took it up, congratulated me—wanted to know when the wedding was to be! I could see my denials were not believed, yet I reiterated them frantically. If I ever met Philip again—and I almost wished I never might—I'd at least clear myself; I'd tell him I had nothing to do with letting the story get out.

It wasn't very long after this publication, I was down at Snow's, buying some valentines for Boy, when Delia Watkins came up to the counter and began pulling over the bits of pasteboard with their verses and pictures. I'd made up my mind that I wasn't going to say a word to her beyond how do you do; but she offered a wavering hand, and the moment I accepted it, dashed right into congratulations on my supposed engagement to Philip Stanley.

I stopped her short with a flat contradiction. She was easy to convince, and said over and over,

"Well I'm sorry it isn't so, I'm sure." Then, "I—Foncie, I'm a true friend still—whether you believe it or not."

"That's all right," I agreed hastily. "Never mind!"

The saleswoman brought my package. Delia saw I was going to leave, and put in,

"Well, Foncie—or would you rather I'd call you Mrs. Baird now?—there's something I have to see you about—I was going out to your house, if I hadn't met you here. Come on up to the ladies' parlor—or the restaurant—where we can be to ourselves, won't you?"

I know I looked reluctant, but before I could think of any way out of it, Delia had me back to the elevator. Going up she began nervously,

"Oh, I miss Gene so—Gene Chandler."

I looked at her startled. Was she getting me off to herself to ask something about Eugenia Chandler? We stepped out into Snow's Pompeian Court restaurant, quite a wonderful place, where big meetings were often held. To-day, at three o'clock, there was scarcely anyone in it; but Delia led the way to a secluded corner under the mezzanine, talking as she went,

"Gene and I and Celia—Mrs. Judge Hoard, you know—were all girls together. Celia's older—she was in High when we were in Grammar—but those girlhood ties—Did you notice the pall bearers? All members of the bar. One of our firm—Walter McBride."

There was no need for me to answer; Delia ordered nut sundaes for us both, and when the girl went to fetch them, put her elbows on the table and remarked with a sigh,

"Wasn't it funny how the Boggs-Pendleton prosecution slacked up?"

"Slacked up? I didn't know that it had. Since when, do you mean?" and I watched her face.

"Well, outsiders wouldn't know. Judge Hoard just stopped taking any interest in the Anti-Vice committee after being the main one—almost. Why, it was through him that our firm was engaged. I hated that, too, with poor little Mrs. Pendleton right there next door. I think I'd die if my troubles were all in the papers like hers are."

She caught my eye, and was suddenly silent. It dawned on me with a great light that she hadn't meant a thing by her allusions to Miss Chandler; there was no connection in her mind between Miss Chandler and the Boggs-Pendleton case. She was just talking against time, working around to her own affairs. Ten chances to one, she had no errand with me but to rake up the trouble there had been between us, go all over it again and sort of patch it up. What she next said sounded that way:

"Men haven't a bit of sense. I had to put my foot down hard to keep Harvey from wading right into the middle of that prosecution—never seemed to think of what the defence might dig up about him."

She stopped significantly. I said nothing. She had to go on,

"I've learned a lot since I talked to you last, Foncie. They aren't all you think they are when you marry them. I've had my eyes opened. Oh, it wasn't you only—I came onto plenty. And I told him what I thought of him; we had it up and down—Foncie, you've been revenged, all right."

"I'm not looking for revenge," I said. "Don't feel that you have to tell me anything about it."

"No—but while we're on the subject," Delia hung to it. "See here, Foncie, I've been hoping you wouldn't *talk*—you know—about Harvey." She glanced up from the menu she was twisting, then her eyes dropped in a shame-faced way. "I always thought it was so perfectly awful to be talked about! Some people don't seem to mind it, but I just couldn't bear to go into a room and feel that all the women in it had been cat-hauling my private affairs. More than once I've had my hat on to come and beg you not to say anything—for my sake."

I shouldn't have thought that Delia's plump, solid, self-satisfied face could look so doleful. When I didn't answer at once, she almost whimpered.

"I never told anybody about Harvey—and my quarrel with you people," I said. Then with a sudden recollection of that Sunday afternoon and Miss Chandler, "Well—never but one person; and she——"

"She?" Delia sat up in her chair; her eyes were round as she fixed them on me—I saw that she would much rather it had been "he."

"Yes, I met her after I left you and your husband that Sunday so mad I couldn't see. She knew right off something was the matter. She cared enough about me to notice."

"You went straight from our house to Mrs. Eccles's," Delia breathed heavily. "I thought that woman had been looking at me awfully queer. Well——"

"You've forgotten," I said. "Mrs. Eccles was at Corinth that Sunday. I had to wait around with Boy till she got back. It was afterward—at the Country Club."

"The Country Club—oh, Fonce!" The very name of the place hit Delia below the belt. "To have it get out in that set! Was—was this somebody who would be likely to repeat what you said?"

"No," I answered, with a little choke, "you needn't be afraid. She'll never tell on you. It was Eugenia Chandler."

"Gene—oh, goodness! I'd rather anyone else in the world——" Delia was beginning. Then with a great wave of relief: "But she's dead!"

"Yes," I said bitterly, "your dear friend, Eugenia Chandler that you miss so, is dead— isn't it handy?"

"Well, there's no use being sarcastic. It's everybody for themselves in this old world. Anyhow, you've taken a weight off my mind. I thank you for that, just the same." She rummaged for her handkerchief in the little velvet bag at her wrist, and scrubbed her nose absently. "If nothing's been said, in so many words—but of course it's been noticed that we're not friends any more. Mrs. Eccles must have suspected. She's a good deal of a talker in her

way. Foncie, you could fix that—easy—just dropping a word here and there to show that there's perfectly good feeling between us all again."

"I wonder at you," I said, "asking me to go around fixing up a story to shield a man like Harvey Watkins! Do you think I kept still out of any consideration for him—or for you either? Why, Delia, when we were quarrelling, you were worse than he was!"

"I don't see how you can say that," Delia argued. "I've been for peace, always, and for everybody's best good. I've tried to think of—of something I could do, ever since the split. I'd have sent Jack a Christmas present—if I'd dared."

She waited, but I didn't see why I should help her out.

"Well," she said, like a person turning over distasteful things with a stick, "sometimes I almost wish I'd had children. I suppose I might as well. Bringing a child into the world wouldn't have been so much harder than the operations I've gone through; and after all we've got the home to keep up. Things might have been different; perhaps it would have held Harve—but it's too late now." She looked at me dismally, saw how I fidgeted with my gloves, and wound up. "You're in a hurry, aren't you? I oughtn't to take up your time talking of my troubles."

I didn't contradict. I only reminded her,

"You said you wanted to see me about something."

"Yes, it's about the banquet. I told them I didn't believe you'd *think* of going."

"Banquet?" I was glad to change the subject. "I've not been invited to any banquet."

"Oh, it isn't an invitation affair," she spoke slowly. "If you ask me, I think it ought to have been—but it isn't. Here in the Court next Saturday night—a dollar a plate. Anybody that's a mind to pay for their dinner can come. I told them that way they'd get a lot of folks they wouldn't want. I offered to see you."

"About what?" I asked.

"Listen, Foncie; it's this way; the Local Federation's giving it. Well, the entire Federation's behind it—State and all—but it's under the direct auspices of the Women's Civic League. Mrs. Judge Hoard will preside. There's to be speaking—a discussion. The idea is to have both sides get a fair hearing, as they couldn't in court."

"Both sides of what?"

"Oh, didn't I say? The riots—up at the Stanley place."

The Stanley place. I began to see light. She hurried on,

"Mrs. Stanley feels all this misrepresentation they've had in the newspapers more than he does; a woman would. She does certainly take it hard—wants to leave California—go to Honolulu—they've a lot of property down there in the Islands. But first, she wants them to have this chance to give their side of the case properly, before nice people. She's president of the State Federation. She planned the banquet with some of the most prominent club women we've got. The Stanleys will motor down and stop at the Richelieu. You see I'm on one of the committees, Callie, and so——"

"See here," I stopped her, "are you asking me to come to this thing, or not?"

"Well—er—sort of not." Even Delia felt that this was pretty raw, for she faced me red and embarrassed.

I jumped up, and reached across for my gloves and parcel.

"So you're on the nice people's committee," I said. "And you undertook the job of seeing that I stayed away. That's what you brought me up here for. Well, you might have saved yourself the trouble."

I walked straight to the elevator. Delia had to stop and pay the cheque, but she caught up with me there, and stood waiting beside me.

"Foncie," there was that old trick of plucking at my

jacket edge, "you won't hold spite against me for anything I've said? You wouldn't if you knew how miserable I am—and scared, for fear we'll lose our standing. If anybody so much as looks crossways at me, I think it's come. Days when I'm blue, I just imagine that everybody's talking already behind my back. I know then how Mrs. Stanley feels. I'd be glad to get out of San Vicente—Las Reudas, anyhow. And we've got that lovely home out there, and all."

"You make me tired," I said, looking sidewise at her. "I've been around with people lately that wouldn't believe you've got a trouble on earth, with your fine house, your good clothes, your money, and three square meals a day."

Next minute the elevator came. I thought this would be the end of it. But Delia kept right with me to the store entrance.

"Good-bye," I was beginning there, when she stopped me with,

"Foncie, what did you mean—back at the table—by saying I might have spared myself the trouble—about the banquet, you know? Are you coming? Or did you mean that you won't?"

"Delia Watkins," I said, "you beat anything I ever saw. Suppose you wait and find out!" And I flounced away and left her.

And after all, I went to the banquet. There was no getting out of it. I couldn't have asked for kinder friends than I had in these days at the Poinsettia. Those idle people at the house, with a little money and no real interests in life, would naturally have been on the side of capital against labour. But when we got home from Las Palmas, Joe Ed was carrying a broken arm in a sling. They welcomed the excitement, and worked themselves into a perfect lather of sympathy with the strikers. Our going back to the trial kept up the agitation. And now there was nobody but me. Joe Ed was away. He had bought

in, last fall, with a man who made Arctic voyages, scientific fur gathering, but mainly for the producing of Arctic motion picture films for educational use. It suited the boy; there were both adventure and money in it. He was in San Francisco now, working with his partner at the outfitting. If the Poinsettians were to feel themselves of any importance at this banquet, it had to be on account of me.

And besides that, Mrs. Thrasher, who always had a few club rows simmering on the back of the stove, was now leading a faction of the Federation which wanted to be sure it wasn't being "used" by Mrs. Stanley just because Mrs. Stanley happened to be State president.

"Go? You've got to go!" she said to me that evening, after we'd all argued for an hour by the fireside in the big front hall. "Every one of us will go. I consider it a duty."

"I think I'd go if I were you, Mrs. Baird," Mrs. Tipton's little high voice came in, and when I turned to her, surprised, "I believe I'd go—and wear my prettiest dress. If you don't, there may be those who will think you're ashamed to."

"Hah! Well put!" said Mrs. Thrasher, in triumph.

"I'll pay for plates for the whole crowd," little Mr. Martin clinched it. "Two, five, seven, eight," counting with sprightly pokes of his forefinger; "oh, eight dollars wouldn't break anybody."

It seemed to be settled. Miss Creevey, Mrs. Martin and Mrs. Tutt—to say nothing of Ermentrude—dashed right into discussions of what I was to wear, as though it had been my coming out party. There was no chance for me to go dressed inconspicuously in street clothes; my recent extravagance, a white crepe de Chine evening dress that I'd never worn yet, was the only thing they would agree to.

CHAPTER XXIII

BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST

THE banquet was for Saturday night. Days before that the advance fringes of the Army of the Unemployed which was that winter wandering up the coast from Los Angeles had been drifting into town. By the middle of the week we had a whole detachment. They were on their way to Sacramento, then for Washington, as Coxey's army once went. San Vicente, more merciful than other towns where they had halted to recruit, did not warn them away, arrest their leaders, or drive them out with fire hose.

Among them were lots of seasonal workers. I saw a good many who had picked hops on Las Palmas; and Friday afternoon I met Sonya Pochin on the street with one of her little brothers. She was fearfully thin, her big black eyes were like coals.

"Is there something I could do for you, Sonya?" I asked. And she answered,

"Yes—come to the mass meeting we're getting up—Fairyländ rink, next Monday. And say to everybody you talk to, 'Not another pound of hops picked in California till Cluett and Monroe are free!'"

"Oh, Sonya"—my heart did ache for the girl—"I want to do something for you—yourself."

She shook her head.

"Never mind me—there are plenty of others worse off."

I had to leave it at that.

When, on Saturday evening, the eight of us started down to Snow's in the street-car, we passed what the Army called bivouac fires near the curb, where the police

were allowing them, on Clarke street, which was wider, cobble paved, and less used. At some there was music; they had marched that day, carrying placards with Sonya's exact words about picking no hops till Cluett and Monroe were free; I saw it was a slogan. They huddled now around their fires, chilly and pitiful. We turned into Main street and left them behind us; ahead was the long line of motors already standing in front of Snow's.

When we got upstairs, we found the Pompeiian Court almost full. Hundreds of guests were getting seated at the twelve or fifteen long tables. The eight places reserved for us were in line, side by side, where we would get a good view of the whole room. As we worked our way in to them, I saw many faces I knew. Dr. Rush and his wife signalled greetings to me, and that drew Delia Watkins's attention my way. Very grand in her mauve and paradise aigrette, she was just being seated between the two Mrs. McBrides, but the look she gave my white crepe de Chine, and my company—the perfectly good Poinsettia crowd—was as though something hurt her feelings. Well, she had waited and found out.

All the rushing about and whispered consultation seemed more than would have been necessary to get the people seated; anyone could see that something besides a banquet was being prepared for. There was a sort of thrill running through everything. While the last arrivals were coming in and finding chairs, we had a chance to look about and exchange comments. At the long table across the head of the room, for speakers and press, I recognised a man from the San Francisco "Examiner," a young woman from the "Bulletin," caught sight of Mr. Stokes's big bushy head, and got the light-blue gleam of Rosalie's one evening frock. She wig-wagged to us, then came sidling over with that odd little shuffle of hers, the good shoulder a bit advanced. Her air was strictly businesslike, but she only bent and whispered in my ear,

"Gosh, Cal, you're swell to-night! I just had to come and bring you the good word. Prettiest thing in the room, bar none—you ol' hop picker!"

She thumped my shoulder affectionately. Mrs. Thrasher, next to me, reached out, took hold of her and began to talk in a lowered tone.

Delia's "nice people" were certainly here. The Court held what I knew Rosalie was going to call "a representative gathering of San Vicente's best." They were tubbed and scrubbed and dressed up, properly behaved, each with his afflictions—if he had any—stowed in the bottom of his own heart. They sat waiting for their meal at white-spread tables, with shining water-bottles and tumblers full of clinking ice, the fountain sounding through a murmur of low-toned, well-bred talk. How could Las Palmas camp with its dirt and drouth, its thirst and smells and uncouth sufferings be brought here? I kept asking myself this all through the banquet, and I didn't get any answer until the banquet was over and we were ready for the real business of the evening.

Then the chairs rasped noisily as they were dragged around to get us all seated facing the upper table, at the centre of which Mrs. Hoard already sat, Milt Stanley at her left, Harvey Watkins, the frock-coated, solemn-faced prosecutor from Chavez county, and both McBrides. The Stanleys were at a little table by themselves almost in front of her; and on her right Arnold Llewellyn, who had so gallantly conducted the losing fight for the pickers, sat alone. Where were his people? What was he depending on?

There was a curious new sound at the rear of the room—a stir and shuffling of feet. I half rose and looked over the heads.

"What is it? Who's coming? Can you see?" whispered Mr. Martin.

Next moment there was no need to ask; he could see for

himself. Our dollar-a-plate respectability was being invaded from the street below. They came up by elevator and stairway, and poured into the restaurant, quiet and orderly, as I had seen them pour into the courtroom at Corinth—the I. W. W. crowd—a delegation from the Army of the Unemployed. I could have cried to see how every one of them showed the effort to be clean and decently tidy. The first comers packed in a solid wall along the back; others moved past and crowded quietly in behind our chairs; then they began streaming up the steps and filling the long musicians' gallery. There were dozens that I'd known at Las Palmas, many who had testified at the trial afterward. The attention of the whole room was caught by the white face and burning eyes of a girl in the front row, against the balcony rail, leaning down, so that those behind could see.

"How odd looking!" whispered Mrs. Martin.

"Yes—and sort of terrible," added Mrs. Tutt.

"She's awfully handsome," said Ermentrude.

It was Sonya Pochin.

The answer to my question had walked in on our astonished gathering of comfortable, well-off people; Las Palmas Labour Camp was here. This move Llewellyn must have been keeping to himself; I was sure it was a surprise to the chairman, and that as she got up and stood to formally open the meeting she was a little nervous.

"One point," she said emphatically, "one point is to be borne in mind; speakers must not be personal. We are all friends here, met to discuss a painful matter in a friendly way. The Civic League of San Vicente has undertaken this meeting in the belief that through it a clearer understanding of what happened at Las Palmas ranch can be reached. But we cannot do this if personalities are allowed to heat and cloud the discussion. Speakers must not be personal." She introduced Mr. Milton Stanley.

Milt—Mr. Stanley had as usual put him forward to

bear the brunt—opened the argument, reading in a low, husky, frightened voice affidavits and resolutions from some Chamber of Commerce, and other public associations, showing that the owner of Las Palmas was a man of the highest standing, a valued member of the community, a public-spirited citizen. The gallery, except for Sonya's tragic face, was soon one broad grin. It was a bad beginning. Someone standing behind my chair whispered hoarsely,

"Say your say, my little man. What we'll do to you when our side gets the floor'll be a-plenty."

Milt had a great stack of the stuff, and he read on and on. Mr. Stanley listened, I suppose, though he never looked up, and his wife kept leaning over and whispering to him. It was the well-bred banqueters who got restless and bored. Llewellyn made no move to interrupt or answer till Milt got on to the Corinth fruit dealer's receipt for lemons bought by Las Palmas—this was to clean up the record of that chemical lemonade that Luella had peddled. Llewellyn hopped up and shouted,

"Yes, sir, and we've got a copy of a receipt from a Corinth druggist's books for the acetic acid you folks bought on August 3rd—enough of it to turn San Benito creek sour. Didn't need many lemons after that, did you? Just enough to float some slices on the top of the barrel—hey? How many have you got a receipt for?"

"Tut—tut—two boxes," quavered Milt, and a titter went over the whole room. After that Harvey and the McBrides and the attorney from Chavez took the argument out of Milt's helpless hands, and we saw with what skill Arnold Llewellyn was going to use these hop pickers who had chanced to come into San Vicente with the Army of the Unemployed. In the discussion that followed, where Mrs. Hoard had to bring both sides up short again and again with, "If you please—if you please—we mustn't be personal," he kept using these living presences

against the windy generalities of the other side. Sometimes in speaking, he'd just point to them, sometimes they were called on to answer, to deny assertions.

I glanced around; certainly those who heard would never be able to forget it. The Stanley cause was going from bad to worse; what the newspapers had said was nothing to this; and here they had it face to face. I never before saw Lucius Stanley seem dashed. Mrs. Stanley kept braiding the trimming of her wrap with nervous fingers. Their paid lawyers did the best they could with a bad case; Mrs. Hoard interposed several times to enforce her rule against personalities.

"Quite right—quite right," Llewellyn cheerfully agreed. "And now we'll close with the most impersonal thing we've got—a government report."

"You have the floor, Mr. Llewellyn," in evident relief.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I won't bore you. I'll not be long. Just a few brief passages from the government report on labour camps in the state of California last fall—where it touched Las Palmas ranch, I mean. After that I don't think we have anything more to say. If the other side has—after that—I shall be surprised. Ladies and gentlemen, I read from the report of the government investigator, an authority on these matters—Mr. Philip Stanley."

I can't be very clear about what happened after that. I know that Mrs. Hoard was on her feet, trying to make some sort of protest, and then she couldn't properly, and sat down. I only wanted to keep a straight face—I felt everybody in my party was watching me. I stared across the room above the heads of the people, but I saw out of the side of my eye how Mr. Stanley, his hands on the top of his cane, looked straight at the floor, while she sat frigid.

Up at Corinth, Philip's testimony had been heard in a court of law. Here was a room full of their own sort of

people, at a social function, sitting to listen while the word of their own son condemned them. The room was still as death as Llewellyn read. He just took little bits from the report—those that would hit hardest and cut deepest. I could fairly feel that crowd of people freezing toward the Stanleys with every word. And they felt it, too. Harvey jumped up and came around the end of the table to them. The three heads were close together, and he was whispering energetically, when Llewellyn rounded up his extracts with,

"There! Now you know why these people have been parading your streets with the slogan, 'NOT ANOTHER POUND OF HOPS PICKED IN CALIFORNIA TILL CLUETT AND MONROE ARE FREE!' You wouldn't blame them if they said 'not another hop picked on Las Palmas ranch.'"

"Your threats do not reach my clients," Harvey straightened up from his consultation. "They are no longer interested in hop raising or hop picking. Las Palmas ranch doesn't belong to them—it's changed hands. Your people can riot all over it next year—the new owners will have to meet the situation as best they can."

New owners for Las Palmas? Chavez county was interested in the ranch—and so in them. The attorney spoke up for their cause, with,

"I still question that point about the drinking water. That's hearsay. The investigator who made the report was never on the ranch till the day of the riot."

Mrs. Hoard, on her feet, put out a silencing hand toward him.

"Pardon me. Haven't we had enough personalities? Can't we close this meeting now with the feeling that both sides to this discussion have been given a sufficient hearing?"

"I suppose you can," said the Chavez county man ungraciously. "And the last thing that'll stand against

us is the hearsay gatherings from the notebook of a man who probably doesn't know how hop picking is——"

At that point there came a startling interruption. Mrs. Thrasher had been nudging me and gurgling, "You know all about that. Get up, why don't you, and answer him?" But it was Sonya Pochin's voice that soared out from the gallery.

"What's the matter with hearing from somebody who was there and knows?"

They all stared up at her. She had straightened from her bending position, and stood looking down at the room almost as if she didn't see it, a desolate figure, with her thin face and burning eyes, the clean decency of her black calico mourning dress.

"I picked hops on Las Palmas last August," she cried. "Water? The dirty stuff from those foul wells would give out before the day was half over. I've seen the time in those fields that I'd almost have sold my soul for the clean water you folks had in your finger bowls to-night. What do you know about it? Up at the grand house where the Stanleys—people of your sort—lived, they were throwing away gallons on the lawn, with their sprinklers—and little sick children over in the camp crying for just one cool drink!"

Mrs. Stanley's head for the first time drooped. I saw her fumbling for a handkerchief, turning aside, edging it up to her face. Here was something that reached her at last.

"We mustn't be personal, the lady says," Sonya's big tones went on. "I am not personal. I've been in your jail—not for any crime—just because I was a witness. My father, Abraham Pochin, killed himself in your jail—under your torments. Yet what are you to me?" she included us all with a gesture. "A handful of dry leaves shaken in the wind. You sit there and think it will always be this way—always this way with you—always this way

with us. You listen to our cause, and do not know what you have heard. Those rich people there think they can sell their ranch and run away from what they have done. They can't do it. We remember—God remembers—and their own son testifies against them!"

"Oh!"

I don't know whether I cried out, or someone near me; I was never sure whether the shock I felt went all through the room, or was just the clutch of my own heart, at Sonya's words. But, anyhow, the next moment we were all on our feet and Mrs. Hoard was dismissing the meeting. The instant she finished, people began hustling about to get their wraps and leave. They pushed in between us and the head of the room, so that we couldn't see what was going on up there, but there seemed to be some hand-shaking between the two factions. I got one glimpse, as the crowd divided a moment, of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley drawn together, apart from the others in close consultation with Harvey Watkins. A second glimpse showed their places vacant, and Harvey, hat in hand, elbowing his way down the room like a man on an urgent errand. My people didn't get toward the entrance very fast, because they stopped to talk with everybody. The mildest of them was fairly crowing over what had happened. I thought we'd never get off. Then I saw one of the maids squeezing her way through in our direction. She touched my arm and offered a card. I took it hesitatingly, and read the engraved name, "Mrs. Lucius Cincinnatus Stanley." Below it, written in pencil, "Will you please come to the writing-room for a few moments?"

I looked at the girl bewildered, and was beginning, "Why we're going now—I couldn't——" when Mrs. Thrasher, who had been frankly reading across my shoulder, jerked my wrap from Mr. Martin's arm and threw it over my own, saying,

"Go right along with the girl. We'll wait here for you."

CHAPTER XXIV,

A WITNESS

THE little writing-room toward which the maid led opened off from the head of the Court. Up here it was all deserted, everybody crowding out toward the elevators. As we got near, I could see by the one small drop-light Mrs. Stanley sitting there at a desk; her eyes followed her husband, who paced up and down the small place.

For a moment that was all I saw. I twisted the card in my hands. They don't kill people twice; that woman in there had sent for me once, and when I went to her she had murdered my youth, my joy of life, my faith, my pride in my lover. Well, I had nothing left that she could take from me now. I went forward and stopped in the doorway, with my head held high. From the shadows there came toward me a tall girl in white, dark-eyed, flushed, excited looking. Mr. Stanley rose and was speaking. He half wheeled at the end of the room and looked at me from under lowered brows, before I realised that the tall girl in white was myself, reflected in a long mirror that faced the entrance.

"It was very kind of you to come," Mrs. Stanley said formally. "We're waiting—Mr. Stanley and I have sent for—— Would you just sit over here?"

I saw the chair she meant, the only other in the room, on the further side of the desk. But I stood where I was and said,

"Mrs. Stanley, what do you want of me? My people are down there, they'd like to go home."

She looked out through the doorway, then glanced toward her husband and suggested,

"We could see that you get home."

"Oh, they'll stay," I said quickly. "But I don't like to keep them too long." I went over and sat down. She moved at once to her husband's side. They stood between me and the door.

"I hope it will only be a few minutes." I thought she spoke as much to him as to me. "We're waiting ourselves. We've sent for—— Oh, here he comes."

I shrank together on my chair. I had walked in confident that there was nothing more the Stanleys could do to me; I had let her keep me, till—there in the doorway, the only exit, stood Philip. He didn't see me, back in my shadowed corner, for the minute he made his appearance his father jumped at him with,

"Well, you got here at last. Did Harvey tell you—?"

It was like iron on iron when Philip answered,

"I didn't ask Watkins what it was you wanted of me—now. I was surprised to hear from you at all. I thought the thing was settled when I refused the trade you offered me through him this morning."

"Trade!" Lucius Stanley snapped at the word; but his wife put in hastily,

"Philip, tell us just what you understood this morning's offer to be."

"That if I'd come and behave like a son, I'd be treated as a son." He nodded backward toward the Court. "Show up with you here to-night."

"What was the matter with that?" his father demanded. "It seems to me very generous. What's the matter with it?"

"Everything," said Philip shortly. "This is no affair of mine. You, not I, have made the name of Stanley stink. I suppose you both hate—just as I do—to put it on a hotel register."

Still nobody noticed me, although they had moved slowly inward as they talked. At his son's words, Lucius

Stanley wheeled and charged toward the curtained doorway as though to leave, but stopped there, his back to us. His wife glanced at that back, then toward her son.

"You're a hard man, Philip," she said. "When you were a little boy—" She paused. "And afterward—when you were older——"

She broke off entirely and stood looking at him.

"Mother," her son answered the look, "we're what we are. If I'd been soft, instead of hard, you and father would have flattened me out pretty thin, wouldn't you? Children grow the necessary weapons for their family environment. It doesn't seem to me you ought to complain."

"Well, well, let that pass. We're making a new offer—one that I think will certainly please you."

They stood there at the end of the long battle, which must have begun in Philip's very babyhood. Father, mother, son, they knew nothing but the struggle they were in. What should I do when Philip finally noticed that I was there—that I had been there, hearing it all?

"Mother," there was a startling thrill of passion in his voice, "I say no, before I hear what it is you are offering. No! Ever since I can remember, my life at home was a succession of explosions—beatings, then bargainings, threatening to send me to jail—offering me a chance to save my hide by giving up the girl I wanted. You and father would have traded the boy's soul out of my fool young body if you'd had your way."

My face burned. Why had I been dragged in to listen to this? Before I knew what I was doing I had jumped up and was making for the door. Then they wheeled and stared at me.

"Callie!" Philip cried out.

"I'm going!" I was getting past them. "I've got no business here." Down by the stairhead at the other end of the Court, I could see Mrs. Thrasher and the others.

"No, no. I forgot you. I'm sorry. Wait a minute." Mrs. Stanley put herself in front of me and stopped me. "Lu," to her husband, "go tell those people that we'll see to taking Mrs. Baird home."

He bolted out, glad enough to go. Philip, watching my disturbed face, suggested,

"I could take you home, Callie. My machine's down there. How would that do?"

Mrs. Stanley glanced at us oddly, then went to the desk, and stood there fingering a paper that lay on it.

"Why, I guess so," I answered Philip. "It doesn't make any difference." And I couldn't conceal a little nervous shiver that went over me.

Instantly he lifted the wrap from my arm and put it around me. And just then Mr. Stanley got back, breathing a little short. He took us in at a look, and inquired sharply,

"Well, have you told him?"

"Why, no, Lucius, we waited for you," said his wife.

"Waited for me to say it, heh? Well, Philip, I judge from that report of yours they read this evening that you believe you know better than I do how to run a hop ranch. You think if you had Las Palmas there would have been no labour troubles on it."

"There would be no labour troubles on any ranch I had the management of," came the answer.

"All right, sir—you'll get a chance to try that out. Your mother and I have about made up our minds to offer you——"

"Milt's position? No, thank you."

"Your father doesn't mean that," Mrs. Stanley came in between them. "He doesn't mean anything of the sort. Las Palmas stands in my name, Philip. I never want to see the place again. Will you take it over?"

"I'm sorry, mother." Philip spoke with more deference;

"but really, I can't see my way to managing the property for you."

"Would you manage Las Palmas if you owned it? I don't want to give the ranch to you and have you sell it. It wouldn't bring its value now. If it belonged to you, would you go ahead with it—keep it for the present, anyhow?"

"Do you mean an outright deed of gift?"

"I should think—" Mr. Stanley was beginning, when Philip interrupted,

"Let mother answer, if you please, sir. In this matter of property you know that I feel that I have some rights—"

"And plenty of wrongs," snorted the older man.

Philip didn't flare up at the taunt. But again it was iron on iron as he answered coldly,

"Well, if you and mother want to give me the ranch—without a string to it—I'm willing to take it. We might shake hands on so much."

And they did. It was a strange thing to see. Again Mr. Stanley stepped to the door.

"Watkins!" he called. "We're ready for you now."

Harvey must have been prowling right at hand. He came instantly.

"Oh, bring your wife," Mr. Stanley added. "We've only got one witness here." And Mrs. Stanley turned to me with,

"That's what I sent for you for. I have the deed ready; and I thought you might care to witness it."

"Certainly," I said, and my voice was steady.

Harvey and Delia came in; the formality was gone through of signing and witnessing a deed of gift for Las Palmas ranch, in Chavez county, from Adelaide Fielding Stanley to her son Philip Stanley, "in consideration of love and affection."

Harvey bore it better than Delia. As a lawyer he would

have often to meet people where the circumstances were—or should have been—embarrassing to him. Yet he never once looked me squarely in the face. At my knuckles as I wrote, at my elbow, the fringe of my wrap that swept across the table—but never in my face. Delia, hushed, subdued, in spite of her mauve, her paradise aigrette, put her name down as witness, looked from one to the other of this impossible group of people, and said doubtfully,

“Foncie—I—I’m sure I’m glad that it was true, after all. I congratulate you.”

I stood there, not a word said; Mrs. Stanley lingered.

“Well,” said her husband impatiently, “Adelaide, are you coming?”

“Yes, yes, Lu,” she answered, still with that puzzled look from her son’s face to mine.

I tried to say something, but couldn’t think of a thing that would be reasonable in this perfectly unreasonable situation. Mr. Stanley caught his wife’s arm and started on; Delia gave Philip a frightened glance and decided not to offer him any congratulations, but followed the Stanleys immediately, Harvey walking beside her.

Without a word, Philip, facing me, his eyes on mine, stowed that deed in a breast pocket. We went down the stairs—the elevators had stopped running—and out through the darkened store, its counters piled with goods and covered. The only words spoken between us were the few that concerned his putting me into his machine which stood at the curb. The other cars that had stood there when we came in were all gone.

“The Poinsettia,” he said as we started out. “Arbolado and Fortieth?”

“Yes,” I answered very low. (If I could just get home!) “I have the back-yard bungalow there.”

We whirled through the business part of town, all silent now, with darkened shop windows, past the dying bivouac fires on Clarke street, a few humped figures around them.

"Poor devils!" said Philip absently; then, as I shivered again, "Cold? We'll soon be there now."

"Yes—no—it doesn't matter," I halted out. He didn't appear to notice. He drove fast, staring straight ahead of him, plainly in a hurry to get me home—where I would have to thank him, and bid him a civil good-night. I braced myself for that moment; I thought I was ready for it when he brought the wheels to a stop at the opening of the green alleyway, got out and reached to help me.

"This it?" he asked.

"Yes."

I wanted desperately to say that decent good-night there, and make an end. But the words wouldn't come. I let him walk with me back to my door. Orma, who had been sitting with Boy, heard us coming, and called, "Good-night, Mrs. Baird," as she slipped out the side way.

And there, in the shadow of the vine, where his face was hidden from me, Philip didn't say a word—left it all to me. A sort of rage against him rose in my heart; the despairing rage that tears so because it is against the one we love. I spoke abruptly.

"I would ask you in—but—"

"You needn't," he said. "I'm coming."

"Oh, don't!" I cried out. "Haven't I had enough to bear to-night?"

His answer was to catch my wrists and pull me with him into the lighted house where he could see my face. His own looked grim and pale.

"What?" he said, "what? Callie, just what do you mean by that?"

"You know well enough." I was afraid I'd break down and cry. "Oh, if you'd only go away! You needn't think you have to—"

I couldn't get any further; I stood mute and looked at him, there in my little sitting-room—after all these years—Philip. Philip, with his faults and virtues upon him—

I had seen them both in full display to-night—and after all, the only man in the world for me. I felt a dreary certainty that it would always be so. In the old days he had been like a young prince; yet he was helpless, too, when it came to our parting; I had never held bitterness against him for that. But now—a rich man, and free—that he should throw me a crumb of civility in saying good-bye—that he should insist on doing so! I couldn't keep up—I couldn't carry it through. I lifted the hands that he still held by the wrists and put them over my face.

“Callie.”

I dared not believe what I heard in the tones of his voice as he spoke my name. I dared not look up. And he said it again.

“Callie, listen to me—I'm going to make you listen.”

Oh, it bridged the seven years. Love, what has it to do with time? When he caught me to him, I was a girl again in Philip's arms, under the oaks in Kesterson's pasture. Gently he pushed one of my hands away, slipped his own in about my cheek, and stood looking down at me.

“How many times I've dreamed of you—like this,” he said huskily. “Never good dreams, Callie. They couldn't be. I'd behaved like a dog to you. When it was too late—when you were married—I'd have crawled on my knees to get you. And then when you were free again—I knew the first minute I saw you standing there on the store porch at Las Palmas that you'd got over loving me—that part of the time you pretty well hated me——”

“I don't! Philip, I——”

“I'm not blaming you. I didn't blame you even that first day, when you gave me such a broadside without ever meaning it. I saw you trying to be decent to me. You didn't like to look at me—never spoke to me if you could help it. It was hard to take; but I did take it. You notice I always came back for my licking. Callie, I walked

in here to-night to ask you to marry me. No—to tell you that you've got to do it."

"I——"

"You needn't tell me any of those things!—I failed you once—you can't trust me—you don't love me? I'll never fail you again, dear—I'm going to trust myself—and *I love you.*"

He held me a minute just looking at me.

"I intended this from the first, when I had anything to offer you, and now would I let you slave alone when I'll have plenty—plenty?" A little shake of my shoulder. "I tell you we'll be married—to-morrow. I'll take my chances on teaching you to love me again."

He stopped, then added softly,

"Say something to me, dear."

I reached up and put my arms around his neck, whispering,

"I wanted to say it all the time, but you wouldn't let me."

THE END

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